



Connecticut's Statewide AIDS Coalition

**Testimony of Shawn M. Lang
Education Committee
29 February 2008**

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, members of the committee; I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm Shawn M. Lang, the Director of Public Policy with the CT AIDS Resource Coalition, Connecticut's only statewide HIV/AIDS organization. We work to ensure that the 10,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in our state have the housing, care and supportive services they need in order to live their lives in dignity.

I'm here to lend my support to Raised Bill 5591: An Act Concerning Health Teens. While I appreciate that the committee raised the bill, I'm concerned that the language is too vague. I respectfully request that the words "comprehensive sexuality education" replace "health issues for teenagers". Comprehensive sex ed is what we're calling for, what youth want and need, and what parents support and believe is already being offered in our schools.

The need for age-appropriate, science based, ongoing comprehensive sex ed is screaming at us from many fronts.

In the State of Connecticut, sexually transmitted disease rates are primarily occurring in youth between the ages of 13 - 24. 70% of all reported Chlamydia cases fall into this age group; as do 50% of all gonorrhea cases. What this tells us is that our youth are engaging in high risk, unprotected sexual behaviors and are ill-equipped and ill-informed as to how to navigate relationships or how to properly protect themselves.

Increasing HIV infection rates are sure to follow in the wake of the STDs rates. In 2007, 15% of newly reported HIV cases in CT occurred in young people under the age of 29. Nationally, half of all new HIV infections occur in people under age 25; one-fourth in people under the age of 21. Because many sexually experienced teens have not been tested for HIV, the actual number of teens living with HIV infection is estimated to be much higher than the *reported* number. Because people tend to get tested later when they have symptoms or end up in the hospital with an opportunistic infection, most of the new HIV cases in people under the age of 29 were infected when they were teens.

I attended the International AIDS Conference in 2006. There was a major focus on youth throughout the conference. I remember one young woman from Canada who addressed a crowd of about 20,000 people. I'll never forget her words and the impact they had on me. She said, "You have no right to withhold information from me that would allow me to protect myself."

While I'm here officially representing the AIDS LIFE Campaign and the 10,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in the state; I'm also here and support this bill because I'm a mom to my 10 year old son, Corbett. Legislation for Comprehensive Sexuality Education is important to me as a parent. It would create exactly the partnership that's so desperately needed between our schools, our kids, parents and the community.

Shawn M.
Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: Lang

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Date: 2/29/08 Bill Number: 5591

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Corbett deserves to get accurate, age-appropriate, science based information to protect him. And as a parent, I have the responsibility to support him with information that responsive and responsible. Please support RB 5591 with the change to replace "health issues for teenagers" with comprehensive sexuality education.

Thank you.

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