

**Testimony of Susan Lloyd Yolen,
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Planned Parenthood of Connecticut, Inc.
*Raised Bill 5591, An Act Concerning Healthy Teens, February 29, 2007***

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, I am Susan Yolen, Vice President for Public Affairs and Communication for Planned Parenthood of Connecticut. Please accept our thanks for raising Bill 5591, *An Act Concerning Healthy Teens*, and for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. All too often, the health of adolescents is taken less seriously than the health of younger children, and it is refreshing to see your concern for the unique health and social concerns of teenagers. Young people have the right to accurate sexual health information that can protect their health and save their lives. Access to accurate, complete sexual health information is a human right.

The interest of Planned Parenthood in this bill is to make certain that any funds appropriated through this bill for incentive grants be earmarked specifically to help improve the ability of those school districts *who are interested and willing*, to improve their delivery of comprehensive sexuality education. By this we mean information that will specifically and increasingly through the school years, help students understand not just the basics of puberty and how human reproduction occurs, but how sexually transmitted diseases and HIV are contracted, how to prevent pregnancy either by abstinence or the use of contraception, how to evaluate healthy and unhealthy relationships, avoid sexual abuse and other risky behaviors, and how to take personal responsibility for their own sexual health. This information is urgently needed. We know that 80,000 teens in state schools told the DPH CT Health Survey in 2005 that they were sexually active, most starting to have sex between ages 13 and 16.

You will hear from others today about the worrisome public health statistics associated with teen sexual behavior: that a majority of Chlamydia cases are among young people, that young people are at high risk for HIV, that teen pregnancy in some parts of the state may be starting to increase. You'll also undoubtedly hear from some that abstinence-until-marriage is the only response. Hopefully, you already know that nearly \$700 million in federal dollars has been invested in such programs nationwide over the past dozen years, and that federal evaluations have found these programs to be flawed and ineffective, both in the US and abroad.

We know that parents want and expect their children to be getting sexual health information in school. Through the Healthy Teens grants to schools funded in this bill, parents should be able to get instruction themselves, in how to talk about sexuality with their children in an age appropriate and positive manner. Parents are desperate for guidance in how to combat the influences of our sex-saturated culture in a way that reflects their values and engages their children in open, honest conversation. Sex is all over the front page, the web page and the TV screen, and nobody's helping parents to talk honestly about it.

This bill should also fund teacher training in how to deliver sex education in the classroom that is medically sound, and while cautionary, doesn't employ the use of fear or judgment to elicit certain behaviors.

Planned Parenthood thus supports bill 5591, but with the specific understanding that the funds appropriated be a resource to schools that want to do a better job teaching comprehensive, medically accurate sexuality education. Thank you.

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