CARC
Connecticut's Statewide AIDS Coalition

Testimony of Shawn M. Lang
Human Services Committee
11 March 2008

Senator Harris, Representative Villano, 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 address SB 6666: An Act Concerning the Reduction of Child Poverty. Specifically, I want to address Section 2 which in part covers sexual responsibility and Section 5 which includes health and sex education and violence prevention. I believe that the language could be more inclusive and broader.

To that end, I respectfully, request that the words "comprehensive sexuality education" replace "sexual responsibility" and "sex education". Comprehensive sex ed is what youth want and need, and what parents support and believe is already being offered in our schools. Two highly-regarded studies, one by the Institutes of Medicine and another by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), found that the one-third earmark for federally funded abstinence programs undermines successful prevention efforts, in part by limiting flexibility on the ground.

The need for age-appropriate, science based, ongoing comprehensive sex ed is screaming at us from many fronts. We all agree that increases in abstinence, faithfulness and delay of sexual debut are critical components of comprehensive HIV prevention, as is promotion of safer sex practices. So, let me be very clear, comprehensive sex ed ***includes*** abstinence.

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 it had on me. She said, "You have no right to withhold information from me that would allow me to protect myself."

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While I'm here officially representing the AIDS LIFE Campaign; 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.

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 Senate Bill 66with the change to include the phrase comprehensive sexuality education. With rising STD, pregnancy and HIV rates, we can't afford not to.

Thank you.

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