

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa,
Community Organizer, Planned Parenthood of Connecticut,
Raised Bill 6494, An Act Concerning Teen Dating Violence Education,
February 23, 2009**

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Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, I am Gretchen Raffa, Community Organizer for Planned Parenthood of Connecticut testifying in support of raised bill 6494, *An Act Concerning Teen Dating Violence Education*. We are thankful to see your concern for the unique health and social concerns of teenagers such as teen dating violence. As a trusted health care provider we routinely screen adolescents for dating violence and make information about dating violence available to all visitors who come to our health centers.

What we know is vast research shows the correlation between dating and sexual risk. Young women who are in an abusive relationship may be at a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, or of becoming pregnant because the power dynamics within the relationship do not allow them to negotiate condom use. Programs to prevent dating violence can positively change attitudes when implemented appropriately for all youth. We also know that comprehensive sexuality education programs can have the same impact and positive outcomes for youth. We understand the urgency to provide young people with information to prevent dating violence but that must be included in a larger, more comprehensive approach which are sexuality education programs.

By comprehensive sexuality education 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, develop interpersonal skills including communication and decision-making, avoid sexual abuse and other risky behaviors, and how to take personal responsibility for their own sexual health. Sexuality education is a lifelong process and this information is urgently needed.

We know that parents want and expect their children to be getting sexual health information in school. Last March, a Lake Research poll of CT voters showed 8 in 10 voters support teaching comprehensive sex education in public schools. The Healthy Teens CT Coalition, comprised of advocates seeking to offer medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education in Connecticut schools, is thankful to this committee for raising the Healthy Teens Act last session to address this urgent need. A similar bill was introduced in the Committee on Children this session, yet we are mindful that there is no funding for such programs. But this vital issue is worthy of attention and eventual action because teens desperately need this information and they need it now.

Planned Parenthood thus supports bill 6494, *An Act Concerning Teen Dating Violence Education*, because we believe young people have the right to accurate and comprehensive information that can protect their health and save their lives. Young people need information which will give them skills, not only to prevent dating violence, but give them the skills to make healthy decisions about their sexual health. Access to accurate, complete sexual health information is a human right. Thank you.