

March 7, 2010

Dear Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischmann:

I am writing to you in your capacity as Co-Chairs of the Education Committee to strongly urge you to support HB5423, An Act Concerning Dissection Choice. The psychological effect on individuals engaging in animal dissection combined with environmental, educational and economic consequences present a compelling argument for its complete replacement and I applaud Connecticut for introducing this important legislation.

I am a Massachusetts licensed psychologist with more than thirty years of experience working with both adolescent and adult clients who suffered various forms of trauma. I have published several papers including one on research regarding the psychological effect on students of the harmful use of animals at all educational levels. If forced to participate, these students suffer severe psychological trauma as the result of seeing themselves or others engaged in behavior that they find ethically objectionable yet sanctioned by authorities. Their cognitive abilities may become impaired, resulting in less learning. They may withdraw and lose interest in science. Students — even those who believe they are willing participants — become desensitized and may develop a utilitarian view of animals, thereby diminishing their capacity for compassion and ethical decision-making. Qualified, compassionate people — especially women — often decide to end their career in science rather than compromise their values. This loss contributes to the gender gap in science and to individuals feeling disappointed and derailed in their career aspirations.

Further, steps have been made to address the relationship between domestic abuse of animals, children and women. Arguably, what goes on under the guise of education would be considered animal abuse if it occurred in another context, and it is possible to make this violence connection in an educational context as well. The recent formation of a bipartisan Legislators for Animal Advocacy group in the State of Connecticut indicates to me that you and your colleagues take this issue seriously — a commendable position for the sake of all Connecticut students.

As an additional pedagogical matter, comparative studies have shown time and again that alternatives to dissection -- from computer programs to more accurately life-like models than preserved "specimens" -- are at least as educationally effective and in most cases, more so, than animal dissection. That both the National Science Teachers Association and the National Association of Biology Teachers acknowledge the educational efficacy of these alternatives is further evidence of their viability as learning tools.

In closing, I see my experiences as a psychologist, former teacher and most importantly as a former student whose own career in veterinary medicine was derailed to avoid being forced to participate in killing and dissecting a frog, strong reason to offer any support I can in helping this legislation become law.

HB5423 would insure that the State's science education curricula were more inclusive, educationally sound, environmentally friendly, economically prudent and humane.

Thank you for your time. If I can be of any further assistance, you may contact me at 978 352 8175 or tcapaldo@aol.com.

Respectfully,
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President
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