Testimony of Zachary Kirwood
In Support of HB 5489 *An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform*
March 15, 2010

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, I am testifying in support of HB 5489 *An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform.* My name is Zachary Kirwood and I am a sophomore at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT. My permanent residence is in Orange, CT. Since fall of 2008 I have been a campus organizing intern for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. In high school, I was a peer educator through Planned Parenthood's Students Teaching About Responsible Sexuality program. These experiences, in combination with my own status as a student, have shown me that there is an acute need for comprehensive health education in our schools. I believe that a one-credit health education requirement for high school graduation would be a great way to help solve this problem.

As a recent graduate of the Connecticut public high school system, I can say that the health education I received was sub-par. As students we were subjected to plenty of drug and alcohol education and physical education, but experienced very little sexual health education. This left many students without medically accurate information about how to be safe, leaving them to turn to gossip among peers as a source of sex education. Even today, on my college campus, many students are dangerously under informed about proper condom usage. It was this lack of education that inspired me to become an advocate for healthy sexuality, and that is the one thing for which I can thank Connecticut's lack of required health education.

Through my work as a campus organizer, I have become aware of some of the sobering statistics of the sexual health of Connecticut's teens. 72% of reported Chlamydia cases, and 57% of reported Gonorrhea cases in CT in 2007 were among young people aged 10-24.[i] In 2009 18% of newly reported HIV infections in Connecticut occurred in people between the ages of 13 -29. African Americans are disproportionately affected by HIV infection; accounting for 55% of all HIV infections reported among people between the ages of 13 and 24. [ii] These are very serious public health concerns, and by not requiring them to be addressed in the context of high school health education, the State of Connecticut would be doing its citizens a grave disservice. Connecticut voters know this, as 83% polled in 2008 said that they believe teens need sexual health education that includes information about abstinence and safer sex.[iii]

Finally, let's keep in mind that health sexuality education is only a part of a larger regimen of comprehensive health education. Health education in schools must include all aspects of health: nutrition, physical education, physical and mental wellbeing, and social health, in addition to healthy sexuality and healthy relationships.

I urge the committee to support such health requirements for CT youth and pass HB 5489 *An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform.* We cannot remain one of only fourteen states with not such a requirement.[iv] Thank you.

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[i] State of Connecticut, Department of Public Health, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, 2007

[ii] CDC. HIV Prevention in the Third Decade. Atlanta: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2005.

[iii] Lake Research poll March 2008

[iv] Other states include; Arizona, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Vermont andWyoming,