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Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee.

My name is Allison MacInnes, I am from Sharon, CT, and am a graduate student at the UConn School of Social Work. I am here today to speak in favour of An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform. Specifically, the language concerning the requirement of a full credit of comprehensive health education for all high school graduates.

Comprehensive health education does not mean just comprehensive sex education. It incorporates information on healthy nutrition, sleep habits, relationships, physical education, mental and emotional health, among other topics, all of which are imperative for students to develop healthy habits before moving on to college and their adult lives. Currently, Connecticut is one of only fourteen states in the country that does not require a health education credit before graduation. Thus, Connecticut high school graduates are at a disadvantage compared to students from states with the credit requirement because they lack the knowledge gained from comprehensive health education.

While all of the topics covered in comprehensive health education are important, comprehensive sex education is crucial. It is only with accurate and factual knowledge that one can make informed decisions regarding relationships and sexual activity. Where will Connecticut students gain this knowledge if they are not required to complete a full credit of comprehensive health education? Their parents? Friends? The media and entertainment such as television and movies? Where is the guarantee that any of these sources will provide accurate or comprehensive information? Parents often feel uncomfortable discussing issues surrounding sex and relationships with their children. Friends exchange information through word of mouth with no way of knowing if it is accurate. The media and entertainment often provide skewed, romanticized, and/or sexist views. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the schools to educate students about relationships and sex.

A current study by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy highlights how little teens know about reproductive health. It found the following:

- 59 percent of young women think they could be infertile if they have had unprotected sex but have not gotten pregnant YET.
- 37 percent of young adults think that taking the birth control pill for one year is riskier to a woman's health than carrying and delivering a baby.
- 28 percent of young men believe two condoms provide more protection than one – something any student who has taken a sex education class knows is NOT true.
- 60 percent say they know "little or nothing" about birth control pills.
- 30 percent say they know "little or nothing" about condoms.
- Finally, according to the survey, young people still believe that having sex standing up will prevent pregnancy…

The information covered above is very basic, and would be taught in any comprehensive health education class. However, the students surveyed are proof that, through whatever method they are "learning" about sex, they are not receiving accurate or comprehensive information.

Meanwhile, the majority of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea cases – 72 percent and 57 percent, respectively – reported in Connecticut in 2007 were among young people aged 10-24 years old. In 2009, 18 percent of new HIV cases reported in the state were in people between 13 and 29 years of age. In a 2005 School Health Survey conducted by the Connecticut Department of Public Health, an estimated 80,000 Connecticut high school students reported that they have had sexual intercourse, nearly 80 percent having it between the ages of 13 and 16.

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I urge you to examine the data above and consider what it means for the lives of Connecticut students. Please pass An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform with the requirement of a full credit of comprehensive health education. It is only with accurate and comprehensive knowledge that our students can protect themselves by making healthy and informed decisions. Thank you.

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