



National Council of Jewish Women

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Dear Co-Chairs Gaffey and Fleischmann, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Fonfara, Ranking Members Giuliano and Caligiuri, and members of the Education Committee:

As the State Public Affairs Chair representing the 4 sections of National Council of Jewish Women, CT, I would like to speak in **support of HB 5489, An Act Concerning Secondary School Reform, specifically about the inclusion of a graduation requirement of a full credit of Health Education.**

Since its founding, NCJW has fought to protect the rights and well-being of women, children, and families. In Connecticut, NCJW has joined with progressive public service, faith-based, and medical, education, and public health professional organizations that make up the Healthy Teens Coalition. The Healthy Teens Coalition supports legislation requiring a graduation requirement of 1 credit in health education, including developmentally appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education. In our state, there is overwhelming popular support for comprehensive sexuality education. Even though 53% of our school districts offer a half-credit of health, there is no coordination between the districts and the State Department of Education, and therefore no guarantee that those health classes use the Department's *Healthy and Balanced Living Framework for Comprehensive School Health Education and Comprehensive Physical Education*.

So this half credit of health cannot be taken for granted. CT is one of only 14 states that does not require a health education credit before graduation. In too many of our schools, students receive incomplete, medically inaccurate sexuality education. It is critical that science and public health—not religious views or ideology—determine the sex education that our young people receive in public schools. In order to make responsible, healthy decisions, young people need—and society has a moral obligation

to provide—medically accurate, age-appropriate information about sex and sexuality. Comprehensive sex education teaches that abstinence is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections but also provides accurate information about contraceptive options so that individuals can make informed and responsible life decisions.

The Healthy Teens Coalition realizes and understands the financial and scheduling constraints that our individual school districts are facing and their reluctance to support any legislation that will add to this burden. But they need to consider the coordinated approach to school health, incorporating physical education, nutrition, mental health, healthy choices and emotions, wellness, and comprehensive sexuality education as an investment—healthy children become healthy adults. Strong girls become strong women. Informed teens keep that information with them through their adult lives. CT schools cannot afford to send their graduates into the world, with excellent math and reading skills, but uninformed about life's choices and pitfalls. It just comes back to haunt the state in the form of the increased health care costs of obesity, smoking, illegal drugs, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV/AIDS. The increased costs of emergency and legal services stemming from dating violence, drunk driving, drugs, sexual assault, and bullying must also be carefully considered.

National Council of Jewish Women and the Healthy Teens Coalition agree with the Connecticut State Board of Education's belief that a coordinated approach to school health effectively aligns health and education efforts and leads to improved physical, mental and developmental outcomes for students. **We firmly support the Secondary School Reform Bill, which proposes a full credit in health education, a requirement that can be met by both high school and middle school education courses.** It is our fervent hope that while this bill would only apply to schools that receive the federal Race To The Top grant funding, it will eventually be adopted by all of Connecticut's school districts.

The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) is a volunteer organization, inspired by Jewish values, that works to improve the quality of life for women, children, and families and to ensure individual rights and freedoms for all through its network of 90,000 members, supporters, and volunteers nationwide.