



National Council of Jewish Women

Contact information:
Audra Weisel, NCJW CT SPA
99 Craigmere Circle
Avon, CT 06001
(860) 675-4302
lettemeatcake@sbcglobal.net

Dear Co-Chairs Kissel and Mushinsky, Ranking members Maynard and Carson and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee:

My name is Audra Weisel and I represent the 4 sections of National Council of Jewish Women, CT as their State Public Affairs Chair. I would like to speak in support of Bill 5165, *An Act Concerning High School Graduation Requirements*, specifically about the inclusion of a graduation requirement of a half credit of Health Education. We strongly urge you to increase this to a full credit, half of which could be fulfilled in middle school.

Millions of women in CT face significant challenges maintaining a safe and secure environment for themselves and their families. Since its founding, NCJW has fought to protect the rights and well-being of women, children, and families. Ongoing advocacy efforts include promoting policies that would reduce poverty and provide individuals and families at all levels of need with access to high quality, affordable health care, child care, and education. Further, NCJW works toward the elimination of and protection from all forms of harassment, violence, and abuse.

In Connecticut, NCJW has joined with 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. 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 or inaccurate health education. It is critical that science and public health—not religious views or ideology—determine the 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 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 Raised Bill 5165 but propose a full credit in health education, a requirement that can be met by both high school and middle school education courses.

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.