

Testimony of Jamie Bassell, HIV Prevention Specialist and Youth Services Coordinator
Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective, Inc.
Adolescent Health Care: Information Forum and Public Hearing
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The Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective (HGLHC) provides medical services, support groups, mental health services and health education tailored to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities and the HIV/AIDS communities. Every year, we serve thousands of clients of all genders and gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, races and ethnicities. We know more about the health needs of LGBTQ youth than the average health care provider. Our youth group, RainbowRoom, has been a safe place for LGBTQ youth in Connecticut for over 18 years. We routinely work with youth who ask for or could benefit from comprehensive sexuality education and specific information about sexuality, gender identity and expression. If queer youth in Connecticut are getting any sex education, it's rarely (if ever) directed to them and their needs. HGLHC offers this to youth at our group meetings, at outreach events, and at clinical HIV/STD testing appointments, but there are so many more LGBTQ youth across the state who would certainly benefit from public school based programs that would provide information about healthy, safer sexuality to help them make informed choices.

We often see LGBTQ youth who deal with stigma, disapproval and social rejection and could benefit from mental health services. Sadly, it seems that many youth don't access these needed services because of barriers including treatment costs, fear of coming out to parents, teachers, or peers, health insurance issues, and finding providers who are skilled at working with the needs of LGBTQ adolescents. The Centers for Disease Control just released a study that suggests gay and bisexual high school students are more likely than their heterosexual classmates to smoke, drink alcohol or do other risky things that may lead to adverse health outcomes. Relevant treatment and prevention measures could help ensure that our LGBTQ youth are not being disproportionately affected by these health challenges. Adolescents, as they are transitioning into adulthood and making their own choices about many aspects of their health, need to be able to access health care services directly in a safe, affordable and confidential way to empower them to take control of their own health and get needed services. HGLHC, like Planned Parenthood of CT, supports existing laws that balance the needs and rights of youth with the concerns of their parents that attempt to foster communication without making mandatory parental involvement itself the very barrier that prevents care.

Thank you for this opportunity to write to the committee about public health issues in Connecticut relevant to LGBTQ youth. While youth are not HGLHC's primary clients, it is our mission to empower individuals of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions to lead healthy lives through the provision of health and support services and education, and to advocate for the right to access such services.