



Connecticut's Statewide AIDS Coalition

**Testimony of Shawn M. Lang**

**Education Committee**

**21 February 2012**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, members of the committee; I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm Shawn M. Lang, the Director of Public Policy with the CT AIDS Resource Coalition, Connecticut's only statewide HIV/AIDS organization. We work to ensure that the 10,000+ people living with HIV/AIDS in our state have the housing, care and supportive services they need in order to live their lives in dignity.

I'm here to advocate for incentive grants for school districts to train educators to become certified health educators. Presently, the job of teaching health, which should include comprehensive sex ed, often falls to the phys ed teacher, or the science teacher, or another educator who isn't certified and may not be comfortable with the subject matter.

Comprehensive sexuality education is what youth want and need, and what parents support and believe is already being offered in our schools. But we know, through experience and anecdotally, that it is not universal in our state for a host of reasons. In every youth forum I have attended, the youth are very clear about feeling cheated when their schools and parents fail to provide them with age appropriate, accurate, evidence based information.

The need for ongoing comprehensive sex ed is screaming at us from many fronts.

In the State of Connecticut, sexually transmitted disease rates are primarily occurring in youth between the ages of 13 – 24. 70% of all reported Chlamydia cases fall into this age group; as do 50% of all gonorrhea cases. What this tells us is that our youth are engaging in high risk, unprotected sexual behaviors and are ill-equipped and ill-informed as to how to navigate relationships or how to properly protect themselves.

Increasing HIV infection rates are sure to follow in the wake of the STDs rates. In 2007, 15% of newly reported HIV cases in CT occurred in young people under the age of 29. Because many sexually experienced teens have not been tested for HIV, the actual number of teens living with HIV infection is estimated to be much higher than the *reported* number.

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High proportions of newly diagnosed HIV infection cases have AIDS at their initial diagnosis suggesting that they are 'late' in disease progression. In 2009, 38.1% of cases met the criteria for AIDS at diagnosis and an additional 9.6% became AIDS by 12 months after diagnosis.

While I'm here officially representing the AIDS LIFE Campaign; I'm also here and support this bill because I'm a mom to my 14 year old son, Corbett. Legislation for Comprehensive Sexuality Education is important to me as a parent. It would create exactly the partnership that's so desperately needed between our schools, our kids, parents and the community.

Corbett deserves to get accurate, age-appropriate, science based information to protect him. And as a parent, I have the responsibility to support him with information that responsive and responsible. Please support our request to offer incentive grants to schools that choose to do the responsible and right thing.

Thank you.

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