

Testimony of Austin Longendyke

Monday, March 7, 2016

Re: S.B. 378: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force

Representatives Fleischmann and Lavielle, Senators Slossberg and Boucher, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Austin Longendyke and I am a resident of Norwich, Connecticut. I am submitting this testimony to express my concerns with S.B. 378, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force.

While I am certain that the members of the task force had nothing but the best interests of students in mind when they suggested the proposed revisions to the high school graduation requirements, **I am extremely concerned with the proposed elimination of the ½ credit of health education.** We owe it to the students in Connecticut to equip them with all of the knowledge and skills necessary to become healthy members of the larger community. As such, we should be *enhancing* the health education that students are receiving in this state, not proposing its elimination in statute.

While I am aware that the elimination of the ½ credit from the statutorily-mandated requirements does not necessarily mean that health classes are going to disappear from schools, I do believe that removing the codified requirement will make health classes more susceptible to being cut when there are budget issues within school districts. The elimination of statutory requirements takes away any guarantee that all high school students are learning the skills necessary to become healthy, informed adults. When health education becomes an elective, students will be less likely to be enrolled in the course; this would be unacceptable, as every person needs to know the information taught in health education classes.

I graduated from high school in 2009, which is before the ½ credit was required. I did receive health education, where most of the time was spent on drug and alcohol education. The sexual health component of the course was mediocre; the most vivid memory I have of it is the teacher literally flinging a condom at a student as if it were a rubber band in order to demonstrate that it was made of latex. I also remember the HIV/AIDS education that I received: a videotape from the mid-1990s about the AIDS epidemic. Through that video, the message that I got as a 14-year-old gay man was that gay men get HIV, which progresses to AIDS, and then they die. It has taken years of further self-education on the reality of HIV/AIDS to get over that initial fear that was instilled into me through that experience.

I am sharing my personal experience with health education to express the need for things to improve for the youth in the state. We need to ensure that the health education being taught in Connecticut schools is age-appropriate, scientifically-accurate, and inclusive of *all* students. We also need the teachers instructing health courses to be properly trained and certified in the subject. Much of this would have to be achieved through separate legislation, but such future

action would be much more difficult if the state no longer required its high school students to receive ½ credit of health education.

Therefore, I respectfully ask you to amend S.B. 378 so that it retains the ½ credit of health education for high school students – I do not support the legislation until that change is made. Health education is a vital component of a well-rounded education. We owe it to the youth of Connecticut – our future – to teach them the skills necessary to become healthy, informed members of society.

I am grateful for your consideration and the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

Austin Longendyke
Norwich, Connecticut