



## **Testimony in Support of H. 5604**

The Womxn Project is a statewide organization focused on leveraging the power of art, activism, advocacy and education to advance the principles of reproductive justice, which demands that we all have the right to determine when and how we build our relationships, families and futures and that we have the ability to live and raise our children with dignity.

We are proud to submit testimony in support of H. 5604, which ensures that young people in Rhode Island public schools in grade 6-12<sup>th</sup> will receive comprehensive sex education. This bill would help to ensure that young people have the information and support to truly manage their health and create healthy relationships. We believe that young people are incredibly capable and have the ability to make responsible, thoughtful decisions about their futures, but too often we deny them the facts and the resources to do so. This bill will begin to address that. It will also help to live up to the commitment to advance racial justice.

Historically, communities of color, have faced higher rates of unintended pregnancy, as well as higher rates of HIV and other STIs. This is in part due to systemic barriers that make it tough to get health care services, but for young people it is also about the fact that we aren't providing the information they need about sex and sexuality.

We have to do better. We are talking about the health and lives of our young people. This bill strengthens the curricula that is being taught in our schools by making sure that young people hear about their different options – that if they are going to be sexually active they know how to manage their health and make good relationships decisions. It requires a discussion of consent, which in light of the recent conversation about the rampant sexual violence faced by women in this country and particularly women of color is way overdue. It also ensures that the discussion includes the health and needs of people of different sexual orientations and gender identities. We are also thrilled to see the inclusion of pleasure as an important piece of healthy sexuality for young people to understand. This is particularly empowering for young women who too often are taught that sex is something that happens to them instead of as part of a healthy future of self-determination and empowered decision making.

H. 5604 supports young people in our state and contributes to stronger communities. We urge your support of this important legislation. It is an important first step. Thank you for your consideration.

Contact: Jocelyn Foye, 714-501-9863, [jocelyn@thewomxnproject.org](mailto:jocelyn@thewomxnproject.org)