

Subject: Opposition to H-5837: Concerns Regarding Parental Consent for Sexual Education Curriculum

To: The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara, Chair
House Education Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives
HouseEducation@rilegislature.gov

Dear Chairman McNamara and Honorable Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Damian Lima and I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill H-5837, which would require schools to provide parents or guardians with the sexual education curriculum and obtain their consent before any instruction takes place.

While the intent of involving parents in their children's education is commendable, this bill raises significant concerns that must not be overlooked.

1. The Bill Is Too Short and Vague

H-5837 is remarkably brief and lacks clarity. It fails to define key terms, outline implementation procedures, or address how consent will be managed and enforced. This vagueness opens the door to confusion and inconsistent practices across school districts, undermining both parents' and students' rights.

2. It Risks Withholding Vital Health Information from Youth

Comprehensive sexual education is not just about anatomy or reproduction—it is a critical component of public health. Many young people may engage in relationships or behaviors their parents do not approve of or even know about. Denying them access to medically accurate, age-appropriate information does not stop those behaviors—it only makes them more dangerous.

Students who are not taught about consent, contraception, STI prevention, healthy relationships, and boundaries are more likely to experience unintended pregnancies, contract preventable infections, and suffer abuse without knowing how to recognize or report it. We cannot afford to leave young people uninformed simply because of the discomfort or disapproval of some adults.

3. This Harms the Health of Rhode Island's Youth

Sexual education is proven to improve health outcomes for youth. *It reduces risky behaviors, delays the onset of sexual activity, and promotes respect and equity in relationships.* Limiting or complicating access to this education could have serious consequences for the long-term health of our youth and our communities.

4. It Creates Inequities and Administrative Burdens

Families from underserved communities—those dealing with language barriers, unstable housing, or limited access to information—may unintentionally miss consent deadlines or be unable to navigate the required processes. This could disproportionately exclude the most vulnerable students from life-saving knowledge. Additionally, this bill imposes a cumbersome administrative burden on already under-resourced school systems. Time spent tracking consent forms is time taken away from education and student support.

In Closing

As a Public Health Professional I can attest that Health education is not optional—it is a cornerstone of public well-being. I urge you to oppose H-5837 and instead work toward inclusive, evidence-based policies that protect all Rhode Island students. Every child deserves access to information that keeps them safe, healthy, and empowered to make informed choices.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Damian Lima, Providence RI