

Kirsten Reveron

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RI House Education Committee

Speaker J. Shekarchi

Chair J. McNamara

Vice Chair T. Noret

Vice Chair R. Kislak

Members of the House Education Committee

I'm writing to **oppose House bill H5837**. While it appears to be a simple amendment to the curriculum subsection regarding sexual education, it's a potential Pandora's box.

I have three concerns with this bill. First, this seems to be a solution in search of a problem. There's a procedure already in place that addresses parental consent. As it stands currently, the system for parents to opt their children out of sexual education as it is provided in Rhode Island public schools is working. A parent can, using their own judgement about their own child, choose for their child to opt out of the class during sexual education units. The system is already in place, and every year there are a handful of students who don't participate in that section of the course (often gym or health). Proponents of this bill suggest that the system as it exists isn't working and has limited parental rights in some way. That is blatantly false.

Also, should this bill pass, it opens a door for more "approvals" from parents in other subject matters. This is a tricky issue, no doubt. Parents should certainly have input on what their children are learning in school. There is now, though, a loud minority who are attempting to control the tenor of education both nationally and in Rhode Island. Should they be allowed to veto a science curriculum because it discusses evolution? A history curriculum because it examines the Civil War? These people cannot be allowed to use their minority opinions to derail education for the greater population of the state.

Finally, the seeming simplicity of this bill is a potential danger. There is no explanation of what follows after parents have received their copies of the proposed curriculum. It raises many questions, and the answers may be complicated. For instance, is it necessary for all or a majority of parents to give their consent for this class to run? What if a significant portion of parents opts out? Will there be a space for students whose parents opt in to receive the planned instruction? What latitude will parents have in influencing the curriculum as it is proposed? Will the contents be open for debate should a parent who is hesitant to either approve or disapprove of the curriculum? This point in particular feels like a slippery slope for the very loud minority to try to remove important elements of sexual education, specifically elements related to LGBTQ concerns. It's a law proposing parental consent, and yet it leaves a great deal of leeway, which could result in parental overreach into the curriculum for other students. This law needs to have specific outcomes described in detail, and it does not. As such, it is too vague to be put into law. A vague law in this context can be a dangerous one.

I urge you with all earnestness to vote NO on H5837.

Kirsten Reveron