



TESTIMONY OF GLBTQ LEGAL ADVOCATES & DEFENDERS
In Opposition to H 5837 – Relating to Education – Curriculum
House Education Committee

Dear Chair McNamara, First Vice Chair Noret, Second Vice Chair Kislak, and Honorable Members of the House Education Committee:

My name is Patience Crozier, Director of Family Advocacy at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD Law). I write in **opposition** to H 5837, An Act Relating to Education – Curriculum. This bill is unnecessary and would be burdensome for schools.

GLAD Law is New England’s leading legal rights organization dedicated to ensuring equality for LGBTQ people and people living with HIV. GLAD’s work with youth focuses on interventions, litigation, policy, legislation and public education designed to ensure that LGBTQ youth are fully included and affirmed in all realms, particularly in schools, the child welfare system, and the juvenile justice system.

This bill is unnecessary. As many states do, Rhode Island law already provides robust protections for parents who wish to review their child’s sex ed curriculum or opt their child out. Parents may already “examine the curriculum program instruction materials” after making a request in writing “to the school principal.” R. I. Gen. Laws § 16-22-18(b) (2024). Any parent “may exempt his or her child from the program” with a similar written request. R. I. Gen. Laws § 16-22-18(c) (2024).

The status quo – an opt-out system – “ensures that more children have access to sex education while ensuring that parents who genuinely oppose sex education can choose to withdraw their child from the program.”¹

¹ Natalie Bayer, Note, *Opting for Opt-Out: A Libertarian Paternalist Approach to Sex Education in Texas*, 102 Tex. L. Rev. 579, 583 (Feb. 2024).

What this bill does, instead, is requires every parent to consent in writing before a child receives any sex education. This is burdensome to parents and educators, and it will undermine access to sex education for all Rhode Island students. Challenges such as time constraints and language barriers are likely to result in low form completion rates among parents. This not only increases administrative burdens on educators but also risks denying students access to essential information and resources. This is likely despite broad support for sex education among American parents.²

Sex education is particularly important for LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ youth are significantly more likely than their non-LGBTQ counterparts to be diagnosed with HIV or contract another STI. These rates are highest in transgender people, who contract HIV at four times the national average, and men who have sex with men, who account for about two-thirds to HIV and syphilis cases.³ A comprehensive sex education curriculum, which many schools across Rhode Island offer, reduces these risks for LGBTQ youth.⁴ But the benefits of sexual education extend beyond LGBTQ youth, to the entire youth of Rhode Island: Multiple studies have shown that sex education supports positive health outcomes in teens and encourages safe sexual practices.⁵

² See Leslie Kantor & Nicole Levitz, *Parents' views on sex education in schools: How much do Democrats and Republicans agree?*, 12 PLoS ONE 1, 1 & nn. 1–4 (2017); Melissa F. Peskin et al., Univ. of Tex. Health Sci. Ctr. at Houston and Healthy Futures of Tex., *Evaluation of the Opt-In Sexual Health and Abuse Prevention Education Policy in Texas: Texas School Representatives' Attitudes and Experiences* at 28 (2023), https://hftx.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Opt_in_Eval_Report_FINAL-compressed.pdf (“Qualitative data suggested that when parents do not return permission forms, it is not because they are making an informed decision to withdraw their child from sexual health or abuse prevention education, but rather only because parents do not know that permission is being sought or failed to overcome barriers (time, engagement, language, others) to return the permission slip.”).

³ Hannah Slater, *LGBT-Inclusive Sex Education Means Healthier Youth and Safer Schools* (June 21, 2013), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/news/2013/06/21/67411/lgbt-inclusive-sex-education-meanshealthier-youth-and-safer-schools/>.

⁴ A 2021 meta-analysis showed that “sex education can lead to decreased homophobia, reduced homophobic bullying, increased appreciation of gender equity, decreased domestic violence perpetration and victimization, increased bystander interventions, improved communication skills, improved understanding of personal safety as it relates to child abuse prevention, improved social-emotional learning, and greater media literacy.” Bayer, *Opting for Opt-Out*, 102 Tex. L. Rev. at 582 (citing Eva S. Goldfarb & Lisa D. Lieberman, *Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education*, 68 J. Adolescent Health 13 (2021)).

⁵ See, e.g., Advocates for Youth, *Comprehensive Sex Education and Academic Success* (2010), https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/wpcontent/uploads/storage/advfy/documents/comprehensive_sex_education_and_academic_success.pdf; Nat'l Ass'n of Sch. Nurses, *Position Statement: Sexual*

The proposed bill requiring parental consent imposes a burden on schools and their ability to deliver comprehensive, standardized education. While parental involvement is essential, this bill would create unnecessary administrative hurdles, requiring schools to ensure that each parent receives and provides written consent for sexual education curricula. This could delay the delivery of critical educational content, disrupt planned lesson schedules, and divert valuable resources away from actual instruction. Schools have an obligation to offer a well-rounded education that prepares students for the complexities of life, and the bill risks creating inconsistent educational experiences that vary based on parental approval, undermining the ability of educators to address important issues in a timely and comprehensive manner. Furthermore, this bill would put Rhode Island in the minority: Only six other states have opt-in systems for sex education.⁶

As such, this bill will be far from beneficial for Rhode Island students, including and especially LGBTQ students. We respectfully request that the Committee not move this legislation forward. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,



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Health Education in Schools (2016), <https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/Position%20Statements/17pssexualhealthed.pdf>.

⁶ *Policy Brief: Sex Ed & Parental Consent: Opt-In vs. Opt-Out*, Sexuality Info. and Educ. Council of the U.S. at 2 (Sept. 2018), <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Policy-Brief-Opt-in-v.-Opt-out-Redesign-Draft-09.2018.pdf>. Texas had an opt-in system starting in 2021, but that provision expired in 2024. Maryam Ahmed, *Making Sex Ed Opt-In, For Good This Time*, The Austin Chronicle (Feb. 14, 2025), <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2025-02-14/making-sex-ed-opt-in-for-good-this-time/>.