

Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903  
House Education Committee  
[HouseEducation@rilegislature.gov](mailto:HouseEducation@rilegislature.gov)

**Re: Against Bill H5837, HOUSE BILL RELATING TO EDUCATION - CURRICULUM**

Dear Representatives Roberts, Quattrocchi, and J. Brien

My name is Reverend DL Helfer, LCSW and I am a resident of Providence, Rhode Island. I am writing in opposition to House Bill H5837, which seeks to limit the sexual education offered to students.

I oppose this bill for several reasons.

One, it mimics other efforts to deny the identity and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, by creating a situation in which any parent can opt out of such education regardless of what their child needs or wants. This is akin to Florida's "don't say gay" law, assuming that if we aren't taught about our own truths, those truths don't exist. We know, instead, that the opposite is true – that it is essential to see ourselves reflected in educational curriculum.

Two, the bill sets up the school district against parents, despite claiming to give parents more power. We've seen what happens in these situations; a small but vocal minority ties up the work of the school for months or years, more interested in their discriminatory agenda than the work of schools, to educate students.

Three, there is ample evidence that teaching youth about a range of sexual orientations and activities is helpful rather than harmful, that knowledge allows youth to make decisions that keep them safe. This bill goes back, instead, to the era of President Reagan, of denial of basic truths to make those truths. In that case, the lie was that AIDS was somehow a deserved disease for gay men. Here the lie is that LGBTQIA+ youth have ANYTHING to be ashamed of, no matter how they identify. Pushing youth further into the closet will harm them and will not benefit larger society. This denial of truth has not worked before and will not work now.

Lastly, and I say this as both clergy and a social worker, we know acceptance, affirmation, and love works. We know how to keep youth supported and alive in a world which already presents them with ample challenges. Limiting their right to learn about their own bodies in an open and accepting manner is punitive at best and cruel at worst. The United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalists, the latter my faith tradition, have offered gender and sex educational curriculum since the 1970s, and I can attest personally that its inclusiveness only helps youth to be comfortable with who they are and thus to know how to keep themselves safe and cared for in terms of sexual relationships.

There IS a better way.

I ask you to vote no on House Bill 5837.

Best,  
Rev. DL Helper, LCSW