



To: Representative Joseph McNamara, Chair of the House Committee on Education
Honorable Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Nicole Jellinek, Chair, Rhode Island Coalition for Reproductive Freedom

Date: March 3, 2021

Re: **Support for House Bill 5604: RELATING TO EDUCATION—CURRICULUM**

Dear Members of the House Committee on Education,

I write to express the support of the RI Coalition for Reproductive Freedom (RICRF) for **House Bill 5604: RELATING TO EDUCATION—CURRICULUM**.

RICRF is a Coalition comprised of 17 organizations working together to share resources, build strategies and coordinate efforts to connect reproductive freedom with social and economic justice. We focus on advocacy and legislative action to enact change.

It is long known that knowledge is power. As a Coalition, we support age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate education on family life and sex education, including issues of consent, and with a recognition of the diversity in our community whose needs must be met. This education is the knowledge that empowers our young people to make thoughtful and safe choices around their bodies and their futures.

Much public health research has documented the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education (and the harm of teaching simply abstinence-only)¹. We strongly believe in preparing our young people to live in our current world, where this information is crucial to their development, sense of self, and ability to foster meaningful, engaged and respectful relationships.

We consider the following important information about RI students to support this bill:

¹ For example, from the Journal of Ethics. <https://journalofethics.ama-assn.org/article/teens-deserve-more-abstinence-only-education/2005-10>

- Approximately 55% of sexually active high school students used a condom when they last had sex, which is a significant decrease from 68% in 2013.²
- One in 12 RI teens say they have experienced sexual violence and 14% of students with a mental or physical disability have experienced “sexual dating violence.”³
- Groups that experience health disparities related to sexual health include adolescents who identify as lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ), adolescents with disabilities, adolescents in state care or who are homeless, and racial and ethnic communities of color. Among high school students surveyed that identify as gay, lesbian and bisexual:
 - 49% claimed that they had not used a condom compared to 37% of heterosexual students, and
 - 19% report having sex before age 13 compared to 4% of heterosexual high school students.⁴
 - According to the SIECUS profile of RI in 2018, 60.4% of Rhode Island secondary schools provided students with curricula or supplementary materials that included HIV, STD, or pregnancy prevention information relevant to LGBTQ youth.⁵
 - The Rhode Island teen pregnancy rate is three times higher for Hispanic/Latinos, and two times higher for Black/African Americans, when compared to Whites⁶

Given the challenges our students face, it is imperative that we provide accurate, relevant and appropriate information to them. We strongly encourage you to vote to pass this important legislation. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.



Nicole Jellinek, Chair, Rhode Island Coalition for Reproductive Freedom

Rhode Island Coalition for Reproductive Freedom partners include:

American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island
 American Congress of Obstetricians & Gynecologists
 Catholics for Choice
 Hope and Change for Haiti
 Humanists of Rhode Island
 League of Women Voters, RI
 Medical Students for Choice
 National Council of Jewish Women, RI Section
 Perinatal Quality Collaborative

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
 Rhode Island Working Families Party
 RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence
 RI National Association of Social Workers
 RI National Organization for Women
 RI Religious Coalition for Reproductive Freedom
 Women's Fund of Rhode Island
 Women's Health and Education Fund

² RI Youth Risk Behavior Survey [Online] 2019. <https://health.ri.gov/data/adolescenthealth/sex/>

³ RI Youth Risk Behavior Survey. [Online] 2015. <http://health.ri.gov/materialbyothers/yrbs/2015HighSchoolDetailTables.pdf>

⁴ RI Youth Risk Behavior Survey. [Online] 2015. <http://health.ri.gov/materialbyothers/yrbs/2015HighSchoolDetailTables.pdf>

⁵ <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Rhode-Island-FY18-Final.pdf>

⁶ RI Youth Risk Behavior Survey. [Online] 2015. <http://health.ri.gov/materialbyothers/yrbs/2015HighSchoolDetailTables.pdf>