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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Education
From: Edward F. Saunders, Jr., Esq., Executive Director
Re: Senate 218, “An Act to Provide Health Education in Schools,” House 3434, “An Act Relative to Providing Health Education in Schools,” and House 402, “An Act Establishing a Health Education Program in the Public Schools”
Date: October 13, 2009

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“Conference”) respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to three bills being heard today before this committee that would mandate sexuality education in the public schools.

Senate 218, “An Act to Provide Health Education in Schools,” and its identical companion House 3434, “An Act Relative to Providing Health Education in Schools,” direct local public school districts to incorporate the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework (“Framework”) in health education programs (see Section 5). These two bills expressly retain the parental “opt-out” provision codified in M.G.L.c71 §32A (see Section 6). They also require a budgetary re-evaluation “to ensure sufficient funding to provide the Health Education envisioned in the Framework” (see Section 8).

House 402 is a separate bill that more generally seeks to make Health Education a core subject for K-12 students throughout the Commonwealth. House 402 also would require health classes to include “current health issues as identified by the Department of Public Health,” which appears to reference the aforementioned Framework.

The Conference generally supports the inclusion of health education in schools. Many of the topics covered by the Framework provide information vital to the physical and mental well-being of children and are non-controversial. However, with respect to the controversial topic of sexuality education, the Conference maintains it is the parents that have the crucial and irreplaceable role in their children’s moral development generally and in particular in the delicate area of human sexuality.

The Conference opposes all three bills based upon the required sexuality education topics contained in portions of the Framework which raise serious moral concerns. The Conference defers to Linda Thayer, a member of the Conference’s Subcommittee on Family Life/Pro-Life and Education, and a veteran Boston public schools teacher, who will submit testimony to this Committee detailing the specific moral problems presented by this Framework.

Regarding the current “opt-out” provision, the Conference believes that requiring parents to “opt-in” is the better approach as this method strengthens the parents’ role as the primary teacher

of their children. See the Conference's Legislative Testimony on House 406, House 485, House 472, House 437, and House 421 also being filed today with this Committee.

Additionally, with state revenues down and core state social programs on the verge of another round of budget cuts, the Conference does not support increased funding for sexuality education that is contrary to the core values of many tax paying residents.

Based upon the foregoing reasons, the Conference respectfully asks that this Committee report Senate 218, House 3434 and House 402 as "ought not to pass".

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield and Worcester.