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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Education
From: Edward F. Saunders, Jr., Esq., Executive Director
Re: House 406, “An Act Regarding Parental Notification and Consent,” House 421, “An Act Regarding Parental Notification and Consent,” House 437, “An Act Relative to Parental Notification and Consent,” House 472, “An Act Requiring Parental Consent on Sex Education in the Schools,” House 485, “An Act Relative to Parental Notification and Consent”
Date: October 13, 2009

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“Conference”) respectfully submits this testimony in support of the shared objectives of House 406, “An Act Regarding Parental Notification and Consent,” House 421, “An Act Regarding Parental Notification and Consent,” House 437, “An Act Relative to Parental Notification and Consent,” House 472, “An Act Requiring Parental Consent on Sex Education in the Schools,” and House 485, “An Act Relative to Parental Notification and Consent.”

These bills differ in language and scope but all of the versions seek to convert the existing parental “opt-out” provision in the law governing sexuality education of children in the public schools (see M.G.L.c71 §32A) to an “opt-in” standard. This change in approach from opt-out to opt-in would make the enrollment of children in sexuality education classes elective by requiring that a parent or guardian provides written consent before a child could attend such classes.

Four of the proposals, House Bills 421, 406, 437, and 472, also would add conscience protection for teachers.

Parents play a crucial and irreplaceable role in their children’s moral development generally and in particular in the delicate area of human sexuality. The parental “opt in” approach would strengthen the parental role of being the primary teachers of their children. In addition, teachers should not be forced to conduct sexuality lessons containing content that the teacher finds morally objectionable and should be afforded conscience protection.

The Conference respectfully urges this Committee to craft a bill, based on the legislation referenced above, which meets the two goals of giving parents greater control over the education of their children through an opt-in provision and of providing conscience protection for teachers, and to report out such a bill with a favorable recommendation.

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.