

To: Joint Committee on Public Health
From: Linda Thayer, Member of the Subcommittee on Family Life Pro-Life, Massachusetts Catholic Conference
Re: Senate 56/House 2174, "An Act To Promote Healthy Behaviors"
Date: January 19, 2010

My name is Linda Thayer and I live in Marshfield. I have recently retired after 34 years of teaching science in the Boston Public Schools. For the past 27 years I have also presented over 2000 programs on respect for life and respect for sexuality (abstinence) in the greater Boston area. I am a member of the Family Life and Pro-Life Subcommittee of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference ("Conference"), and I would like to testify against **Senate 56/House 2174, "An Act To Promote Healthy Behaviors"**.

Senate Bill 56/House 2174 should be opposed for the following reasons:

(1) The beginning of my career in Boston roughly coincided with the decision of the Federal government to provide contraceptives to teens in the neighborhood clinics - the beginning of "comprehensive sex ed and "reproductive health services" for adolescents. While I was not comfortable with this as a matter of public policy, I felt that perhaps it was the answer to unintended pregnancy. As I watched over the course of 2-3 decades, all of the problems that this policy hoped to solve increased: teen pregnancy, teen abortion, sexually transmitted diseases. The only thing to dramatically decline was marriages and the quality of family life. Subsequently when federal funding for abstinence education was started, we began to see some reduction in these problems.

By grade 12, 91% of American teens have been taught in school about birth control; yet the rates of teen pregnancy and STD's remain unacceptably high. In 2008, the CDC found that 26% of American teenage girls had an STD; among African-American teenage girls the rate was 48%. **Senate 56/House 2174** represents an extension of a failed public policy.

(2) A recent analysis of nine "comprehensive sex ed" curricula determined the following with regard to content:

- Promoting contraception 29%
- HIV/STD awareness 25%
- Healthy relationships and benefits of marriage 0%
- Abstinence related material 5%

Given that family planning clinics by definition provide contraceptive and abortion services, the following questions need to be answered:

- Who will determine the content of the educational materials used by the family planning clinics?
- How much emphasis will be given to abstinence? To resisting pressure, the number one reason why teens become sexually active?

- How much emphasis will be given to the benefits of marriage and family formation?
- What will be the role of abortion counseling and/or referrals?

Massachusetts has the 48th lowest teen birth rate in the nation; however, Massachusetts has the 11th highest teen abortion rate in the nation. Will this legislation expand the role of abortion for teens in Massachusetts?

(3) If the sex education provided by the family planning clinics is in accordance with the Mass.Comprehensive Health Education Frameworks (1999), the materials with respect to condom use to prevent the spread of disease may be outdated.

- In 2001, the National Institutes for Health reported that their study had been unable to prove that condoms adequately reduce the risk of certain STD's (herpes, chlamydia, HPV, etc.).
- According to the website for the Centers for Disease Control, "Since a condom may not cover all infected areas, even correct and consistent use of a condom **cannot** guarantee protection from genital herpes". Currently, at least 1 of 5 sexually active Americans over the age of 12 is infected with genital herpes (www.cdc.gov/std/HerpesiSTDFact-Herpes.htm 2004).
- Condoms have a 15% failure rate in pregnancy prevention annually; since pregnancy may occur only a few days per month, the failure rate for disease prevention is actually higher.

Furthermore, the Conference generally supports the inclusion of health education in schools. 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 bill's title may lead one to believe that the bill's purpose is to advocate for the development of healthy behaviors. However, the bill may actually encourage family planning agencies to provide students information on sex education, family planning and abortion that is in direct opposition to the cultural and religious values of their families.

For these reasons, on behalf of the Conference, I urge that **Senate 56/House 2174** not be approved for passage.