



In Support of S.209 and H.450 – An Act relative to healthy youth  
Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education  
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) has a long history supporting public policy that protects reproductive choice, consumer education on maintaining health and equal access to education for children. The LWVMA supports sex education, along with a lengthy list of widely respected health and education organizations.<sup>1</sup>

S.209 and H.450 offer both good public policy and equal access by ensuring that children everywhere in the state will get an age-appropriate education in all health-related issues, including those related to sex education. They also uphold the existing state law that lets parents opt-out their children from sex education programs.

Research shows that providing medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education helps young people to stay healthy – enhancing their ability to learn.<sup>2</sup> In Massachusetts today such sex education is not universal. In some public school districts we find excellent health education, while in others there can be little to no teaching on this subject. To this day, the laws governing educational standards in the Commonwealth still do not explicitly recognize health education as a core subject. As a result, there is no guarantee that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will continue to maintain academic standards on this subject to help local school districts meet their students' educational needs. S.209/H.450 legislation provides guidance and a set of standards to follow when a district chooses to teach sex education.

In 1993 the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the Commonwealth must provide an adequate education for those enrolled in the public schools. It further defined "adequacy" by requiring that students possess specific capabilities, including "sufficient self knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness." In response to this ruling, DESE created a science-based health education framework.

These curricula cover such critical topics as nutrition, mental health, safety, substance abuse and violence prevention. When it comes to relationships and sex, these programs teach the benefits of abstinence, while providing vital information on contraception and prevention of pregnancy, disease and violence.<sup>3</sup> Providing information to teens that helps them make informed decisions about their health is especially critical to improving educational achievement, given that teen pregnancy is the leading cause of dropout among young women.

LWVMA urges the members of the Joint Committee on Education to give S.209 and H.450 a favourable report and work to make it law in Massachusetts.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Medical Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American Public Health Association, the Institute of medicine, the Society of Adolescent Medicine, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the National School Boards Association.

<sup>2</sup> Freudenberg, N/ Ruglis, J - *Reframing School Dropout as a Public Health Issue*, *Prev Chronic Dis* 2007; 4(4), [http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07\\_0063.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07_0063.htm), accessed March 27, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Kirby, *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy*, *Emerging Answers* 2007; Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases 127-136, 2007, [http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/EA2007/EA2007\\_full.pdf](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/EA2007/EA2007_full.pdf)