



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Education
In Support of S.268/H.544, An Act relative to healthy youth
By Janis Soma, LWVMA Legislative Specialist on Women's Issues
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) has a long history of supporting public policy that protects reproductive choice, consumer education on maintaining health, and equal access to education for children. LWVMA, along with many widely respected health and education organizations, supports sex education in our public schools.

S.268/H.544 is grounded in good public policy and offers equal access by ensuring that children across the state will get an age-appropriate education about health-related issues, including those related to sex education. These bills uphold existing state law that allows parents to opt their children out of sex education programs.

Research has shown that comprehensive sexual education increases knowledge of sexual diversity, dating and intimate partner violence prevention, development of healthy relationships, prevention of child sex abuse, improved social/emotional learning, and increased media literacy. Substantial evidence supports sex education beginning in elementary school, that is scaffolded and of longer duration, as well as LGBTQ-inclusive education across the school curriculum and a social justice approach to healthy sexuality.¹

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) finalized [new standards](#) for sexual health education in 2023 that address the needs of different age groups. S.268/H.544 would require the use of these or similar comprehensive standards for schools that choose to offer sex education to their students.

In 1993, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the Commonwealth must provide an adequate education for those enrolled in the public schools. The Court defined “adequacy” by requiring that students possess specific capabilities, including “sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness.”² In response to this ruling, DESE created a science-based health education framework. When it comes to personal relationships and sex, these programs provide vital information on contraception and prevention of pregnancy, what constitutes consent in a sexual relationship, aspects of disease and violence as well as the benefits of abstinence.³

Providing information to young people that helps them make informed decisions about their health is especially critical to improving educational achievement, given that teen pregnancy is a leading cause of dropout among young women.

¹ Goldfarb, Eva and Lieberman, Lisa, *Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education*, Adolescent Health, 2021 Jan, 68 (1):13-17, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33059958/>

² McDuffy v. Sec’y of the Executive Office of Educ., 415 Mass. 545, 615 N.E.2d 516 (Mass. 1993)

³ Lameiras-Fernandez, M., Martinez-Roman, R., Carrera-Fernandez, M.V., Rodriguez-Castro, Y. (2021). [Sex education in the spotlight: What is working? Systematic review](#). *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18, 2555

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, which represents over 3,000 members in 44 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, urges the members of the Joint Committee on Education to give S.268/H.544 a favorable report.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.