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ACLU of Wisconsin Urges Assembly to Pass the Healthy Youth Act

The ACLU of Wisconsin urges the state Assembly to pass AB 458, the Healthy Youth Act. This bill would raise state standards for human growth and development curriculum (a.k.a sex ed) to a comprehensive sexuality education model which would be the educational link to make a positive, public health impact on teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates. Comprehensive sexuality education would ensure that Wisconsin public school students get effective, age-appropriate and medically accurate information about reproduction, contraception and relationships.

“We know that parents are the best people to instill values in their children,” said ACLU of Wisconsin Community Advocate Stacy Harbaugh. “But we should all agree that public schools should be in the business of teaching the facts about health and reproduction. The Healthy Youth Act would get us back to teaching students science-based facts. All teens, even those who choose abstinence, should know how their bodies work.”

There has been criticism of this bill that suggests it would override local control of school boards’ decisions about sex ed. To the contrary, this bill is far from a mandate. If passed, it would raise state standards on “human growth and development” curricula that are taught in the state. Local school boards can choose what ever curriculum they want, but if it fails to meet state standards, they can’t define it as “human growth and development” curriculum under the new state statute. And if schools aren’t teaching students the facts, they have to send a letter to parents saying so. As with current law, any parent can opt their children out of whatever human growth and development lessons are being offered.

Comprehensive sexuality education is an important issue for civil libertarians. There are many curricula options that are effective and have a broad base of support from medical and educational advocacy organizations. But the Healthy Youth Act is also non-discriminatory and honors free speech. Specific provisions of the bill would require that

sex ed be taught without bias in gender or sexual orientation. And rather than muzzling teachers in abstinence-only mandates, the Healthy Youth Act would let teachers answer students' questions about reproduction with honesty and accuracy.

The ACLU of Wisconsin urges Assembly representatives to vote "yes" on AB 458 during the floor vote tomorrow and help pass the Healthy Youth Act in Wisconsin.

The ACLU of Wisconsin and its 8,500 dues paying members defend and promote the civil liberties and civil rights of all Wisconsin residents. Learn more about the ACLU of Wisconsin at www.aclu-wi.org, get updates at capcityliberty.blogspot.com or follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

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