

Memorandum

TO: All Members of the House of Representatives

FROM: Representative Chelsa Wagner

DATE: January 2, 2011

SUBJECT: Co-sponsorship of Legislation - Comprehensive Sex Education in Schools
(Former HB 1163)

In the near future, I will be reintroducing legislation that would amend the Public School Code of 1949 to provide for comprehensive and age-appropriate sex education in our schools.

There is no question that discussions between young people and their parents or guardians are essential if they are expected to make responsible and healthy life decisions. Still, given the large amount of time children spend at school, these institutions have a responsibility to ensure that young people have the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy decisions, protect their sexual and reproductive health, and prevent unintended pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Various studies and reports make it abundantly clear - the need for comprehensive sex education in our schools cannot be downplayed.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 46% of high school students had sexual intercourse in 2009 and 39% of sexually active high school students did not use a condom during their last sexual intercourse. More alarming, almost half of all new STI cases are among youth aged 15 to 24. In terms of teen pregnancy, despite an overall decline from 2001 to 2008, teen birth rates continue to be high in several urban areas of the state, and rates continue to be higher than the state average among minority groups and in many rural counties. In 2004 alone, costs associated with teen pregnancy added \$389 million to Pennsylvania's healthcare delivery costs. Conservative estimates place the lifetime medical costs associated with STIs in young people at \$6.5 billion.

Research has identified highly effective sex education and STI prevention programs that have a positive effect on areas such as delaying when young people begin to have sex, increasing the use of condoms and other methods of contraception among sexually active teens, and reducing the overall frequency of sex among adolescents. At this writing, over twenty states mandate public school instruction on sex education. As reintroduced, this bill will incorporate the results of the bipartisan amendment process in the Education Committee during the last session, which led to the bill being advanced by the committee with votes from both parties.

My proposal would improve the health of our young people and save significant amounts of taxpayer money at the same time. If you would like to co-sponsor this important piece of legislation, please contact Johnathan Detrick in my Harrisburg office at 717-783-1582 or jdetrick@pahouse.net.