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Dear Chairman Roebuck and Members of the House Education Committee,

We are writing on behalf of all American Red Cross chapters in Pennsylvania to express our support for House Bill 1803.

This important legislation requires an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) in every public school and school athletic event in Pennsylvania and at least one person trained in its use. It further requires AED training for school athletic trainers. The American Red Cross supports this bill - the mission of our AED program is to promote and encourage public access to AEDs. The American Red Cross supports the position that improved training and access to AEDs could save 50,000 lives each year. We believe that all Americans should be within four minutes of an AED and someone trained to use it.

Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is one of the leading causes of death among adults in North America. Each year, it claims the lives of an estimated 250,000 in the United States alone. Once every one or two minutes, another American succumbs suddenly, without warning.

Prompt administration of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can help. But CPR cannot restart a heart by itself. In more than two-thirds of all cardiac arrests, an electric shock, known as defibrillation, is needed. Studies show that prompt CPR followed by early defibrillation can reduce death from sudden cardiac arrest. The links in the cardiac chain of survival include early activation of the emergency medical system (EMS), prompt CPR, early defibrillation and advanced cardiac life support (post-incident care provided in a hospital setting). Weakness in any link lessens the chance of survival.

The average response time for first responders once 911 is called is 8 to 10 minutes. For each minute defibrillation is delayed, the chance of survival for a person in cardiac arrest is reduced approximately 10%. Having an AED on-site at schools – or other public facilities for that matter – can clearly make a big difference in a patient's likelihood of survival.

By enacting legislation to support the use of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) and by increasing the number of individuals that are trained to respond, the survival rate

can be increased significantly. Some studies indicate early CPR and defibrillation can double survival rates for sudden cardiac arrest that occurs outside hospital settings.

State legislators around the country have proposed more public access to AEDs, in public buildings, transportation centers, large offices and apartment buildings. Good Samaritan laws in all 50 states now provide legal protection for responders who use defibrillators to help save or sustain a life.

Because AEDs are easy to use and the device requires little instruction on use, several states have recently passed legislation mandating the placement of AEDs in public places such as schools (Arkansas, Texas & Georgia) and health clubs (Oregon, Arkansas, California and New Jersey).

Based on the facts above, it is clear that increased availability of AEDs in public places will save lives. Schools have large concentrations of students and employees during operational hours and are the sites of athletic and other community activities during normal operational hours and outside those hours. Enacting this legislation will make schools in the State of Pennsylvania safer places to learn, work and play.

Having an AED on site and a staff person trained in its use could be the difference between life and death for someone who suffers sudden cardiac arrest at a school.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express our support of this important bill.

Sincerely,

Tom Foley  
American Red Cross  
Pennsylvania State Relations Representative

John Hughes  
American Red Cross  
Regional Executive