



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony
House Education Committee
Public Hearing on House Bill 2318
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Good afternoon Chairman Clymer, Chairman Roebuck, Representative Gingrich, and distinguished members of the House Education Committee. Thank you for convening this meeting to discuss child exploitation awareness education. I welcome this opportunity to discuss the department's role in advancing this effort.

I am Carolyn Dumaresq, Deputy Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education with the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The focus of our conversation today is one that should be of great concern to all – the safety and wellbeing of our children.

Protecting children from exploitation should come through many interventions. The Department of Education has a critical role in providing one of these interventions by assisting both educators and children in identifying and reporting abuse. The recently enacted Child Abuse Recognition and Reporting Training Act (Act 126) has focused the Department of Education, through the Office of Safe Schools, to work with the Department of Public Welfare to review and approve course providers to train school personnel, including those who work in nonpublic and private schools.

This training is for all school employees and contractors to obtain information on how to identify and properly report child abuse. Within the next few weeks the department will post Act 126 training information on the Standards Aligned System website: www.pdesas.org. The site will provide schools with guidance on trainings, a list of approved training providers, course details and any related fees. It will also include a question and answer section so that school districts can have their questions about the Act's training requirements answered. Districts will be able to contact the department's Office of Safe Schools if they require additional information.

Act 126 focuses on giving information to the providers of services to children to accurately identify and report instances of child abuse. House Bill 2318 provides a much different intervention as it will focus on the child. The bill charges the Department of Education to work cooperatively with organizations in the development of a model curriculum that school districts may incorporate into existing health curriculums. The focus of the curriculum would, with age-appropriate material, help children become aware of the signs of child abuse and to learn how to properly alert a responsible adult – giving the silent victims a voice and courage to self-report. But even more important, the knowledge that these types of prevention programs offer can also help our children to gain the skills in preventing child abuse.

As the bill encourages, the department will work with other agencies to identify or develop age-appropriate curriculum and materials for use in schools. We will also strive to find materials and resources that are free to incorporate into the frameworks that are developed.

I have two minor concerns in the legislation that I would like to bring to your attention: first, the use of “annual health curriculum framework for students in kindergarten through eighth” and “annual health curriculum.”

The State Board of Education’s Curriculum Regulations require that “health education is provided to every student every year in the primary (generally grades K-3) and intermediate (generally 4-6) programs. Health education is provided to every student in the middle school program (generally grades 7-9) but not every year. Since instruction is not required annually in the middle this may be difficult and expensive to implement. As a result, the department’s recommendation would be to remove term “annual,” as well as initially develop guidelines by grade levels rather than curriculum. The guidelines will allow for school districts to develop their own curriculum based on the needs of their population and to reflect the community’s values.

Secondly, when stating “a student shall be excused from all or parts of the child exploitation awareness education program” this section comes across a bit unclear as to when the parent would be able to make this decision. The department recommends adding “after the parent or guardian has reviewed the materials.”

Thank you for the opportunity to address this issue, and for your support of our children.