An Act relative to healthy youth provides schools with the choice to enhance their sex education curricula with medically accurate and realistic materials. This bill gives students, parents, and school districts a choice to support teenage health through scientifically proven, age-appropriate sex education. Other states such as Maine, Colorado and California have adopted these curricula and have seen a sharp drop in teenage sexual activity as well as an increase in safer sex and healthier relationship behaviors.

The Bill
S.209/H.3793: An Act relative to healthy youth

Excerpt from Storybook
What does the bill do?
Bill S.209 provides guidelines to teach a medically accurate, age-appropriate, comprehensive sexual education, covering abstinence, birth control methods, healthy decision-making, and healthy relationships free of violence and coercion.

Why do we need it?
“I look back and think about how much difference would have been made if my school had done the simplest things early on, like talk about sex… I believe the foundation starts at a young age.” – Student Advocate for Sex Ed Matters

Elevator Speech
Hi, my name is Sophie Miller and this is Ally Bernstein. We find the issue of teen sexual health and healthy respectful relationships extremely important. Massachusetts needs to educate its teens so that they are able to make safe decisions. Supporting a healthy youth and comprehensive education provides teens with information to help them make responsible choices regarding both their relationships and personal health. Under the bill provisions schools would be required to teach both abstinence and contraception, as well as
information does not help teens make positive choices. Students are to be educated on what a healthy respectful relationship consists of, specifically one that is free of coercion and violence. For example in New Hampshire, students are educated with a comprehensive sexual education program, and statistics show that New Hampshire has the lowest rate of teen pregnancies. Students educated with a comprehensive health curriculum are therefore more informed and better capable of successful achievements.

An Act relative to healthy youth, bill S.209/H.3793, would only require that schools already teaching a health curriculum teach a comprehensive, medically-accurate, and age-appropriate one, which is proven to be most effective in helping youth.

This bill is sponsored by Representative James O’Day, and was originally sponsored in the Senate by Katherine Clark. This bill is currently in the House Committee on Ways and Means. However, there are minimal fiscal implications and parents can opt their child out of the curriculum if they choose. We would like your help by contacting them to show your support of An Act relative to healthy youth. Do you have any questions or reservations regarding this bill? We would like to address any questions or concerns you may have.

Letter to the Legislator

The topics of health and education are ones we find extremely relevant and important to our community. Massachusetts needs to educate its teens to inform them on sexual health and positive dating behaviors so that they are able to make safe, responsible and healthy decisions regarding their own behaviors. We support a comprehensive sexual education, which provides teens with health information that will allow them to make safe and informed choices in regards to their own sexual health as well as their relationships. Many teens have expressed wishing to have been better educated in school so that they could have made more informed decisions regarding both their health and relationships.

An Act relative to healthy youth, bill S.209/H.3793 is sponsored by Representative James O’Day, as well as the Joint Committee on Education. It was formerly sponsored by now U.S. Congresswoman Katherine Clark. This bill requires only that schools who are currently teaching a sexual education curriculum teach a medically-accurate, age-appropriate, comprehensive one, which has been proven to be most effective in helping youth. While currently many schools are already teaching a curriculum, it is not always a medically-accurate one, and the lack in information does not help teens make positive choices.

A comprehensive sexual education curriculum not only teaches contraceptive methods to prevent teenage pregnancy and the contraction of STIs, which are both large problems affecting our youth, but it also teaches teens on how to live a healthy lifestyle as well as factors that contribute to having healthy and positive relationships. According to the CDC, young people contract almost half of the nation’s 19 million new STIs each year, additionally 1 in 10 students has experienced dating violence. These numbers are very high and could both be lowered through a comprehensive health education curriculum, which has been proven to be effective in numerous other states. Parents of a local teen that was killed due to dating violence have commented wishing their daughter had been better informed about healthy relationships. An Act relative to healthy youth is not a mandate and does not impose any requirements on schools not already teaching a health education curriculum, but rather provides a set of standards for the school districts that have elected a sexual health curriculum.

Currently this bill is stuck in the House Committee on Ways and Means. However this bill has minimal fiscal implications and allows parents the full option of opting their child out of the curriculum if they so choose and therefore should not be considered controversial. Opposition to the bill claims that schools will teach children information on how to obtain abortions without their parents consent - this claim is completely false and while the framework does include curriculum materials regarding abortions it is presented to students of the appropriate age. We would like your support and help by contacting the House Committee on Ways and Means to express your support for this bill regarding health education for youth.

House Ways and Means Script

We would like to talk with you today about the issue of teen health. Massachusetts needs to educate its teens so that they are able to make safe decisions. The future health of teens is determined by the risks and decisions they make today. In order for teens to make safe, smart and responsible sexual health decisions they need a comprehensive sexual education curriculum so that they can make informed decisions.

An Act relative to healthy youth, bill S.209/H.3793, would only require that schools already teaching a health curriculum teach a comprehensive, medically-accurate, and age-appropriate one, which is proven to be most effective in helping youth.
In addition to sexual health education, Massachusetts teens need information on respectful, coercion and violence free relationships. 1 in 10 students experience dating violence. In Wayland, 18 year old Lauren Dunne was killed by her ex-boyfriend. Lauren’s mom, Mary, wants her daughters story to be a wake up call to other teens that are in abusive or violent relationships. Schools also need to take an active role by informing teens about healthy relationships. Research has shown that schools who have included information on healthy relationships as part of the curriculum have students that are 60% less likely to continue dating violence behaviors against a partner after learning about safe dating.

This bill is sponsored by Representative James O’Day, and was originally sponsored in the Senate by Katherine Clark. As you know, this bill is currently in the House Committee on Ways and Means. Parents can choose to opt their child out of the curriculum, making it a noncontroversial issue for parents and legal guardians that have fundamental disagreements about teaching sexual education to teens.

There are minimal fiscal implications of this bill. The estimated costs of the bill are approximately $50,000 and the benefits of the bill are likely to exceed the costs. An Act relative to healthy youth is considered a revenue neutral bill because it is not a mandate but rather provides guidance and a set of standards to follow when a district chooses to teach sexuality education.

In 2004 Representative Henry Waxman from the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Government Reform reported that 80 percent of federally funded abstinence-only education programs present students with distorted information on contraceptives, misinform students of the risks of abortion, blend religious views and scientific perspective, present and perpetuate gender stereotypes as scientific facts rather than social constructs, and contain basic scientific error.

This bill will not only make sure that the information provided to students through education programs is medically-accurate, but will also ensure that the government funded money is used on comprehensive health education programs that have been proven effective with students so that money is no longer wasted on ineffective and inaccurate school curriculum. Since many schools are already teaching a health education and schools who are not will not be required to add one, this bill will require very minimal funding.

Also there are many resources that are available for schools that find they need to improve their sexual education curricula. The Department helps make the transition to comprehensive sexual education quick and cost-effective through an approved list of online programs and by offering free training and guidance to schools.

This bill is not a mandate and should not be viewed as controversial because of the following: the bill does not require schools to provide sexual education but rather provides those schools that do choose to teach a sexual health curriculum with a set of standards. An Act relative to healthy youth does not interfere with local control, each school district as well as parents and legal guardians remain autonomous in their decisions about teaching a comprehensive sex education curriculum and their individual child’s participation. Additionally, the comprehensive sex ed framework does not remove abstinence from the curriculum but rather informs students about both contraception and abstinence.

In the long run, An Act relative to healthy youth has the potential of saving the state money by preventing teen pregnancies in which the state would have to support the child in addition to saving money on treatments for STIs.

This bill has positive fiscal implications since the comprehensive programs are not costing any additional money and these preventative programs in turn can actually save the state money in the long run. “Since 1997 the federal government has invested more than $1.5 billion dollars in abstinence-only programs – proven ineffective programs which censor or exclude important information that could help young people protect their health.”

Therefore An Act relative to healthy youth would be the best option not only for revising the school curriculum but also fiscally for the state as it is both most effective as well as costs less. For these reasons we would like the bill to be voted out of the House of Ways and Means so that it can return to the House of Representatives for a third reading during this session.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Ally

Sophie and I went to the Planned Parenthood in Boston to interview Tricia Wajda and Alicia Johnson. Tricia’s position at Planned Parenthood is the Director of Public Affairs while Alicia is the Media Relations Coordinator. In a conference room at the Planned Parenthood office Sophie and I sat down with Tricia and Alicia to discuss the bill, H.3793, An Act relative to healthy youth. The purpose of this meeting was to record video footage for our video. Alicia requested not to be on camera, so we focused most of our questions towards Tricia. Tricia supports the bill on the fundamental level but also as a mother of two boys. She provided us with personal stories about some
of the questions her sons were beginning to ask about reproduction and where babies come from. Her boys are still young, ages 7 and 4, and extremely curious. She found herself at a loss for words when presented with such questions and stressed the importance of schools educating both students and parents on the best way to handle the topic of sex.

**Sophie**

One problem my partner and I have encountered though when working on our bill is the opposition's viewpoint on our bill. While we believe this bill to be common sense and something that should be passed to ensure medically accurate information is taught in schools that are choosing to teach a sexual education curriculum, many on the opposition are misinformed about what the repercussions of the bill are. They believe the bill will teach teens how to have sex, or how to get an abortion, something many are strongly against and that the bill does not do. Educating these people on what the bill actually does so that they can better understand and no longer oppose the bill has been an issue for us.

Our biggest struggle though when trying to get this bill passed is in talking with the legislators who have been voting against the bill, not because they disagree with it, but because they know their constituents do and would be very angered by them voting for it. Once we have educated these legislators on exactly what the bill does and does not do, they usually agree with it. However it is harder to educate the broader population and therefore harder or near impossible for us to get the legislators to vote against what their constituents want.

**Update**

As of September 12, 2014, H.3793 was in the House Ways and Means Committee.

For more information

**Planned Parenthood Massachusetts**

http://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts