An Act relative to healthy youth addresses the issue of a lack of medically accurate, comprehensive, and age appropriate sexual education in Massachusetts by setting a standard curriculum that all schools that offer sexual education must follow. The curriculum would address topics like pregnancy and STD prevention, communication, and healthy relationships. Even in schools that provide sexual education, often students do not have the resources and information they need.

**Bill**

S.2113/H.3704: *An Act relative to healthy youth*

**Elevator Speech**

We are concerned that young people, like us just a few years ago, are not being provided with the tools they need to best prepare themselves for the future. Massachusetts students are not guaranteed the information and resources they need to make healthy choices. One in five teen girls in Massachusetts public schools have experienced sexual violence. Chlamydia cases in the state have gone up 60% in the last decade. Sexual violence and STDs can have lifelong impacts on people’s mental and physical health. Considering that only 41% of teens reported even talking about sex with their parents, schools present us with a perfect opportunity to combat these issues.

Comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate sex ed. is a key way to provide resources and the skills for healthy decision making to young people, for the common good of our community. That is why we are urging you to vote ‘yes’ on An Act relative to healthy youth. Thank you for your time.

**Excerpt from the Storybook**

Expert testimony from Samantha Grosser, sexual education instructor:

“If you don’t understand the risks, your decisions are not going to be as informed...you could have higher rates of STDs, pregnancy...In this era of ‘me too’, everyone has a story. Consent is about understanding and empathy at the end of the day. If you don’t have comprehensive sexual education, there’s no opportunity to ask, learn.”

**Op-Ed**

Sivan

Title IX used to be about sports teams. In 2018, we know it’s about more than sports teams. The Obama administration rightfully expanded its use to include protections for survivors of sexual violence. Students who have experienced sexual violence do not have
the same opportunity to access education. This is gender discrimination.

As a country, we have begun to make progress towards eradicating gender discrimination in higher educational settings. Yet, unintended youth pregnancies are a major cause of gendered inequitable access to education and is continuously ignored by our policy makers and school administrators. It is now common practice for institutions of higher education to have Title IX officers to investigate cases and support survivors. But, in Massachusetts, our institutions of lower and secondary education have yet to make that investment in our young girls. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, over 83% of pregnant high school students in Massachusetts will drop out. This is a barrier to equal education for all.

**MYTH:** If you get pregnant and want to stay in school, stay in school. Or get an abortion, both are options.

Imagine being fifteen and living in a low-income neighborhood. You have all the stress that comes with being poor, fifteen and in high school. Now, you have learned that you are pregnant. Your family does not have the funds to support another child. Your pregnancy likely means you have to get a [/another] job. You have become a target of gossip. You are considering an abortion, but there is limited access to clinics in your neighborhood, and it would cause gossip and shame onto your family unit. In the meanwhile, stress is becoming overburdening. You cannot focus in class anymore because your mind is elsewhere. Your grades begin to slip. This adds more stress. Eventually, the mental stress in addition to the physical tire of attending school and working becomes too much to handle. You make the difficult choice to drop out. You know that “just staying in school” or “just getting an abortion” are not as simple as they sound.

**MYTH:** You made the choice to have sex. This is your own doing. You deal with the consequences. Schools do not need to be involved.

No one gets pregnant on their own, yet pregnant young women are the only ones paying the cost of their education. Young men who impregnate by and large stay in school. Much of the research done on pregnancy related drop-out rates doesn’t even include men who impregnate because of how unaffected they are. This is gender discrimination.

This is why we need comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate sexual education in Massachusetts. The studies are irrefutable. We have known for decades what the research continues to show us: comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate sexual education is most successful in delaying sexual activity, and ensuring that young people make healthy choices when they do choose to be sexually active. It results in lower rates of pregnancy and STDs. It’s not enough to just have sex ed. It must be medically accurate and comprehensive. Abstinence only sexual education programming has been proven to be as ineffective as no sexual education whatsoever.

We need to be equipping our young people with the tools necessary to make healthy choices. If and when we don’t, young women pay the price. Massachusetts House Bill H.3704, An Act relative to healthy youth, would ensure that all sexual education in the state would be comprehensive, medically accurate and age appropriate so that fewer young women will be denied their education. The bill has already passed the senate and was hours away from passing last term. This bill, this step towards eradicating gender discrimination, lies on our shoulders as citizens. Call your house representative and urge them to vote yes on Bill H.3704, An Act relative to healthy youth.

### House Ways and Means Script

Representative Sanchez, we are concerned that young people are not getting the tools they need to best prepare themselves for the future. As the sponsor of An Act eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities in the Commonwealth and a co-sponsor of A Bill to advance contraceptive insurance coverage, both bills that try to close opportunity gaps between minority and majority to ensure that all people are healthy and safe. An Act relative to healthy youth is just the kind of bill you should support. In addition, given your 100% rating by NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts, you can continue to show your commitment to reproductive rights and health by supporting this legislation to its passage.

The consequences of inadequate and medically inaccurate sexual education are grave. Massachusetts ranks 19th in the nation for HIV and 17th for syphilis. Most gonorrhea and chlamydia cases in the state occur among people ages 15-24. The state spends millions of dollars each year treating STDs, but has yet to invest in preventative education. Young people in Massachusetts are ill equipped to make basic healthy choices and there is an epidemic in our country – Massachusetts included – of sexual violence in part caused by an inability to articulate and understand consent. One in five girls in Massachusetts public schools have experienced sexual violence. 6% of young girls (middle school aged) and 20% of teen girls have reported experiencing dating violence. This could be mitigated if schools taught students the communications skills needed to articulate and understand consent and communicate in a healthy way in relationships, and form healthy relationships.

The dangerous consequences of the subpar sexual education requirements are greater for those who are non-white, low income, and/or LGBTQ+. In Massachusetts, the teen birth rate among Hispanic teens is more than three
times that of white teens. Teen pregnancy has long term negative effects on the economy, as teen mothers tend to have much lower earning potential. LGBTQ+ teens are also more likely to engage in riskier sexual behavior. These are just some of the reasons why we are advocating for An Act relative to healthy youth, which requires age-appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive sexual education in Massachusetts schools that offer it. The curriculum outlined by the bill focuses on aspects such as prevention of teen pregnancy and STDs, emphasis on abstinence as the most effective method, communication in relationships of all sorts, consent, and healthy decision making. This applies to all schools that already offer or plan to offer sexual education.

While opponents of the legislation argue that sexual education should be left to the home for parents to teach their children, the fact of the matter is that only 41% of Massachusetts students reported discussing sex and sexuality in any capacity with their parents. Opponents have also argued that the legislation will mandate sexual education against the will of parents. However, parents will still be allowed to opt their children out of sexual education courses, and see course materials. In addition, opponents argue that this is a mandate for sexual education, the requirements of the bill are not very different from other curriculum requirements. The bill provides guidelines that schools can follow and implement in different ways. Similar to any standardized discipline in Massachusetts, schools can choose their own curricula as long as it includes the basic provisions outlined in the bill.

According to the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts and one of the bill's sponsors, Rep. James J. O'Day, the cost to the state would be minimal. While there will be some costs implemented on the school districts' whose sex education does not meet the new requirements, there are school districts whose sexual education already meets and exceeds these requirements, whose curricula could be used as a resource and a base. Some of those costs could include costs for new trainings, new hirings and new materials.

Representative Sanchez, we admire your previous commitments to combatting medical and health inequality, demonstrated by sponsoring bills such as A Bill to ensure patient safety and An Act eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities in the Commonwealth and co-sponsoring A Bill to advance contraceptive insurance coverage. We are urging you to, once again, stand for the health and safety of our community by calling for a vote on An Act relative to healthy youth and voting it out favorably.

**Letter to the Legislator**

As people who live in your district, we are writing to you to help push for An Act relative to healthy youth's passage in the House. As someone who makes important choices that impact millions of people, you know better than anyone how vital getting information is to smart and responsible decision making to ensure they have lifelong health. With your sponsorship of An Act safeguarding the health care decisions of young adults, you have demonstrated an awareness of the importance of young people making decisions that are best for them and the delicacy of matters of sexual health. There is another issue that deserves your attention. In Massachusetts public schools, students are not being guaranteed comprehensive, and medically accurate sexual education. The consequences of students not learning about consent and healthy relationships are vast. One example of these repercussions is the fact that 1 in 5 female teen students in public schools in Massachusetts have been assaulted.

With proper sexual education, people will make healthier decisions. All these reasons and more are why you should support An Act relative to healthy youth, which ensures that all schools that provide sexual education will provide age appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive, and inclusive sexual education that covers topics such as pregnancy and STD prevention, critical thinking skills, communication, and healthy relationships.

This is not a mandate, as opponents of this bill would lead you to believe. School districts will still have flexibility in how they teach sexual education. Neither does it force parents to do something they are not comfortable with. Parents will still get to decide if they are comfortable with their children taking sexual education, and can opt them out. The benefits of this bill are worth the costs, and anyone who is uncomfortable with it is not negatively impacted by it. We ask you to push for this bill's passage in the House.

**Campaign Journal**

**Anne**

*Meeting with Nikki Goldschein, Government Affairs Associate at Planned Parenthood; and Leda Anderson, Policy Counsel*

From this meeting, I learned more about the history of the legislation and other perspectives and key beneficiaries, namely LGBTQ+ inclusion and STDs. Planned Parenthood also informed me about organizations they are working with, how they are framing the issue, and challenges of passing the bill and reasons for opposition to it. They also gave me
names of people I could talk to about this bill. Overall, the meeting went well. It helped give me a better overall view of the bill and past efforts and ways the bill was being framed now. It gave me some more to think about in regards to how to approach our own advocacy about the bill. Through this meeting, I was able to get a more holistic view of the bill and issues surrounding it and get ideas for more research to do. I was also able to think more about how I talk about the bill. In trading some important statistics back and forth, I was able to think about what might make the most impact. In addition, learning more about the history of the bill allowed me to think more about how the bill is being approached now the evolving issues with both the legislation and sexual education in Massachusetts.

Sivan

Meeting with Massachusetts Representative James O’Day

In preparation for our video project, Annie and I spoke to our bill’s sponsor. We had already spoken with the representative before and heard why he felt the need to continually advocate for this bill. In our initial meeting with him he told us of his time as a social worker and how during that time, he would meet with young teen girls who genuinely did not know how they became pregnant. When we met with him once again, to fill him, he reiterated this story. I expressed to him that we really would appreciate any stories he had to articulate the urgency of this legislation, and he was more than happy to do so. Additionally, he went out of his way to connect the legislation with pressing issues of the day, such as the #metoo movement.

Updates

As of June 7, 2018, the bill had passed and was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill:
malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H3704

Planned Parenthood
plannedparenthood.org