

The Reverend C. David Morgan

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Chairman Williams and members of the Education Committee: I thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of House Bill 316, Act for Our Children's Future.

By way of introduction, I am an ordained Presbyterian Minister and have served for 26 years as Pastor of the Calvary Presbyterian Church in Canton, Ohio. In addition to the many opportunities I have had as a church Pastor to work with our community's young people, I have also served on the Board of the Canton Urban League and am now serving on the Stark County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board.

Throughout the years I have been in Canton, I have been actively involved in working with students, teachers, and administrators in the Canton City School District. Support for public education runs through several generations of public educators in my family and is a part of my religious tradition.

Several years ago in response to reports that implied that there was an inordinately large number of female students who were pregnant at one of our City's High Schools, the Canton City School District determined that a review of its Health Education curriculum was in order. I was one of the community members asked to be part of the task force to review the curriculum and make recommendations. One of the first things we learned was that the number of pregnancies at the Timken High School was very close to the national average for pregnancies in urban schools. I do not suggest that this means everything was good, but rather that the sensationalist manner in which the rate of pregnancies was reported led to outlandish national attention to what was merely a nationally normative rate, albeit a surprising one to the people of Canton. We also learned that the curriculum in use was approximately thirty years old, that the pregnancy rate had been higher in some years in the past and lower in others, and that the old curriculum was one which was an abstinence only curriculum. Obviously, we were dealing with a system which provided very little in the way of health and sexuality information, and what little information was provided was woefully outdated. That there were unintended pregnancies in the school age population confirmed the dismal failure of "Abstinence Only – Just say 'NO' to Sex" as both public policy and pedagogical prescription.

House Bill 316 is, in my opinion, a long overdue correction to the public education policy of the State of Ohio. It affirms the ability of local communities to determine whether or not sexual health information will be taught in their public schools. But it ensures that whenever communities choose to include sexual health education in their curricula, they will be providing comprehensive information that relies on measurable data rather than the wistful wishes that arise from the fog of misinformation and the speculative conjectures of conversations among the uninformed.

Neither HB 316 nor I in my testimony before you ask that you endorse my or any other particular religious moral tradition. Indeed, HB 316 implicitly recognizes that there are in our society many

faith traditions and many moral teachings regarding human sexuality, and it leaves to the families and religious communities of Ohio the responsibility for teaching and modeling their own specific moral approaches to human sexuality and sexual health. What this bill does require is that accurate information be taught in the public educational system when and if the subject is taught at all.

The Health Curriculum Task Force of the Canton City School District recommended, and our Board of Education adopted, a curriculum which is considered to be Abstinence-Based Comprehensive – the type of curriculum intended by HB316. It includes information about sexually transmitted diseases, health risks of teenage pregnancies, and the economic and social implications of unintended pregnancies as well as information regarding handling peer pressure and avoiding behaviors that put one at risk for either disease or pregnancy. I am pleased to be able to report to you that, since the adoption of this curriculum, the pregnancy rate in Canton's High schools has decreased each year, even though I would also acknowledge that the curriculum alone cannot be the only reason for the decreases.

A free people by definition must be able to make free choices. But the absence of accurate information precludes free choice. We teach our children accuracy in mathematics without withholding information lest they use it to create a fraud like Enron or a sham like Bernie Madoff. Should we not likewise teach accurate information in regard to our own health and the health of our children? I believe we should, that we must, and that is why I support HB 316 and urge you to act for our children's future.

Thank you again for your consideration, and I am happy now to answer any questions you may have.

C. David Morgan