

**PROPONENT TESTIMONY
HB 316**

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Ladies and Gentlemen of the committee:

I am here today to give testimony as to my experience in working with students and their sexuality education. I have been a GRADS (Graduation, Reality and Dual Role Skills) coordinator since 1989. The GRADS program is a curriculum within the school that assists students that are pregnant and/ or parenting. The GRADS coordinators have been very fortunate over the past several years to have Representative Oelslager on our advisory committee. He has always been a very welcome asset to our program.

It was not long into my tenure as a GRADS instructor when I realized that, while I was ready to help students and their parents with an unplanned pregnancy, I increasingly began to feel like a “firefighter”. Students would seek my assistance after the crisis occurred. After they had a positive pregnancy test I would help them deal with the decisions and problems that they were to face. I began to see that the best way to really help students was to give all of them the information that they needed to prevent pregnancies from happening in the first place. I also wanted to share information with students who felt that an unplanned pregnancy was the worst thing that could happen to them if they became sexually active. Most were not aware of, or afraid of, risky behaviors that could result in sexually transmitted diseases that would have a long- term effect on their lives. I began to form a plan to initiate sexuality education for our students. I took these lessons to our high school health and sociology classes and to the science classes at our middle school. The abstinence based self- designed instruction included teen pregnancy prevention, sexually transmitted diseases and methods of birth control.

In the mid 1990's a local committee was formed to develop an age appropriate sexuality education program for North Canton City schools. During this same time period, then state representative Jane Campbell introduced a bill into this same legislative body to mandate a state-wide program of abstinence based, medically accurate, age appropriate family life education. Unfortunately, due to some negative ideas about such a curriculum, that legislation failed to pass. In North Canton the curriculum ran into the same opposition and was tabled and eventually forgotten.

I continued to teach sexuality education lessons in the three school districts that I was assigned to as a GRADS teacher. I would approach teachers in appropriate subject areas and ask them to be a guest speaker in their classes. Two years ago in North Canton, a group of parents of middle school children attended a meeting with the principal and requested that more than abstinence only lessons be incorporated into the curriculum. They wanted abstinence based, but also additional information that they all felt was crucial for their children. At that time a committee was formed to revise the way sexuality education is being taught in our fourth through ninth grades. I have attached a copy of that curriculum to this testimony.

One instance that comes to mind during my years of teaching sexuality education was a ninth grade information day in one of my districts. Several agencies were called upon to bring in presentations to the ninth graders on a variety of subjects which included drugs, alcohol, gangs, bullying, etc. I was there to talk to students about the problem of teen pregnancy. I had occasion to observe another presentation that day in which the students were advised that abstinence was the right choice to make, and that any other choice would surely be dangerous. Part of the presentation included the speaker telling the students that "condoms don't work". I spoke to that speaker later and challenged her facts, but she was adamant that the only way to keep students

from being sexually active was to “scare “ them into abstinence. That incident heightened my awareness of messages that were relayed to students that were incomplete to the point of being incorrect. I pondered as to how many students may later have had an occasion to choose condoms, but remembering that “they didn’t work” made them decide just to not use them at all.

Teen attitudes toward sexual activity and teen pregnancy have changed considerably over the years. Unfortunately, their attitudes do not always belie their knowledge. We have students that feel that the only “risky” sexual behavior is one that will result in an unplanned pregnancy. In addition, we have students who accept an unplanned pregnancy more readily than the previous generation would have. I guarantee that the students that I see daily have changed their attitudes toward sexuality. These attitudes are continuing to change and are not always aligned with those that we would like them to have. I would invite all of you to come into my classroom and listen to what my students, some as young as the sixth grade, say not only to me but also to each other. I could include all types of statistics and studies with this report that would prove my point. These studies would show that more teens are choosing to be sexually active and because of that STDs and teen pregnancy numbers are rising. What I can’t include is what I see and hear every day that continues to shock even me.

If legislators, educators, and communities insist on continuing to think that abstinence only education is doing justice to our children, then we need to be prepared for the continuing negative consequences for our young adults.

Thank you for your time.