



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTRUCTION SHOULD RESPECT PARENTS, LOCAL EDUCATORS, WCC SAYS

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) has urged state legislators to allow Wisconsin law governing education for human growth and development to continue to respect the judgment of parents, local school leaders and advisory committees. The WCC comments were offered during a public hearing held by the State Senate Committee on Education regarding Senate Bill 324 and its companion, AB 458. This legislation would impose new requirements on public school districts that opt to provide instruction on human growth and development.

Kim Wadas, Associate Director for Education and Health Care, offered the WCC's testimony. She observed that opinions differ as to the best way to educate children about their sexuality and reduce adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI). She noted that the Church is among those who teach children to avoid unintended pregnancies and STIs by delaying sexual activity until marriage.

“Whatever our position, however, we have to remember that parents have the first and most important responsibility for educating their children,” noted Wadas. “Public laws and educational policies can either support and affirm parents as the primary teachers, or they can undermine parental authority and responsibility.”

Wadas argued that the state's current law on human growth and development instruction recognizes the role of parents in providing moral guidance to their children and outlines how school districts can aid parents. The law gives local school boards the discretion and flexibility to create educational programs that are best suited to the needs of their students and communities.

Wadas argued that the pending legislation substitutes the authority of the state for that of parents and local school boards. She highlighted this by stressing two points.

One, the language mandates that if the Department of Public Instruction applies for federal funds for teen pregnancy prevention programs, these programs must, among other things, demonstrate an increase in contraceptive use.

Wadas stated how this mandate devalues abstinence as a message to our youth, as well as devaluing those parents who want to convey that message to their children. “The Legislature should not tie the hands of school boards, and through them parents, in this manner. If school

boards choose to adopt sex education programs that do not promote contraception, they should be free to do so.”

Second, the legislation extends an unfair advantage to a certain kind of volunteer health care provider to come into the schools to teach human growth and development.

“If these bills were to pass, volunteers would be permitted to provide instruction on sex education, though only those who promote contraceptive use would be able to fulfill all the mandatory subject requirements. Any program or volunteer health care provider who questioned the ‘health benefits’ of contraceptives for children could be denied admission,” she explained.

Wadas suggested that today, more than ever, parents and teachers need to give students the support and practical tools they need to withstand the enormous pressures to engage in premature sexual activity.

“Such an education is not just about avoiding pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases,” she said. “The best education teaches children to develop their unique character and potential, to grow in their capacity for love and responsibility.”

“Rather than dictating a uniform approach for all sex education programs across the state, the Legislature should focus its efforts on encouraging all parents, educators, health practitioners, and other concerned citizens to create diverse and innovative ways to address the moral and health care crises affecting our youth,” Wadas concluded.

The Committee took no action on the bill at the hearing.

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The WCC’s website features a copy of the [testimony](#). For more information, contact Barbara Sella or Kim Wadas, 608-257-0004.