



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 21, 2011

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE SUPPORTS REVISING HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT MANDATE

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference urged support for legislation to provide local districts more flexibility in teaching human growth and development classes, as well as to permit abstinence-based instruction.

In testimony presented on October 19, 2011, to the Senate Committee on Education, WCC Associate Director Barbara Sella urged legislators to support Senate Bill 237, the “Strong Communities...Healthy Kids Act,” describing it as “measured, tolerant, and inclusive legislation.”

SB 237 would restore the flexibility and local control that school districts enjoyed up until this academic year in offering different approaches to human growth and development instruction.

In her testimony, Sella explained that under current law, school districts only have two options: either they must offer comprehensive sex education or nothing at all.

“By contrast, SB 237 gives school districts the option of offering 1) comprehensive sex education, 2) abstinence-based sex education, 3) both comprehensive and abstinence-based education, or 4) no instruction. SB 237 also gives school districts the option of instructing pupils in single-sex courses. Finally, it strengthens local control by revising the composition of the ad hoc advisory committee to ensure that it truly reflects the wishes of the community.”

Sella further noted that SB 237 increases parental involvement: “Parents are the first and primary educators of their children. Again and again, research demonstrates that when parents know what their children are learning and doing, when they communicate openly, impart their values, and set meaningful boundaries, their children are less likely to engage in risky behavior of all kinds. SB 237 gives parents more choices about how they wish to see their children educated, thereby empowering and encouraging them to become more, not less, involved in their children’s lives.”

Noting that SB 237 is more inclusive than current law, Sella listed the bill’s recommended subjects that currently are omitted in the state-mandated HGD curricula: prenatal development, the nature and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, adoption, prenatal and postnatal care, personal responsibility, the benefits of marriage, and the skills to remain abstinent.

“At the same time,” Sella explained, “the bill retains important topics in the current law, such as prevention of bullying, resources for survivors of sexual abuse and assault, criminal penalties, and sex offender registration.”

Sella concluded her testimony by reflecting on the importance of sound education in this area.

“What we teach our children about sexuality today will help determine the kind of society we will live in tomorrow. It is not enough to give children information on staying safe and healthy; they also need formation and guidance. The best sex education is not just about avoiding pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The best education teaches children to develop their unique character and potential, to increase their self-worth and self-restraint, and to grow in their capacity for love and responsibility. Intelligent and compassionate instruction helps students learn from past mistakes and change potentially damaging behavior.”

The committee took no action on the bill after the hearing.

-30-

For more information, contact Barbara Sella at 608/257-0004.