



MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT HEALTHY TEENS ACT—A.2856(Gottfried)/S.1342(Winner)

March 2007

Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), the nation's oldest provider of services for people with HIV and AIDS submits this memorandum in strong support of this legislation. The bill would amend the public health law, and the state finance law relating to establishing the age-appropriate sex education grant program, to be referred to as the healthy teens act.

GMHC is a not-for-profit, volunteer-supported and community-based organization committed to national leadership in the fight against AIDS. Our mission is to reduce the spread of HIV disease, help people with HIV maintain and improve their health and independence, and keep the prevention, treatment and cure of HIV an urgent national and local priority. In the absence of a cure or preventive vaccine for AIDS, our best hope of stemming the epidemic lies in *preventing new HIV infections*. GMHC strongly supports comprehensive sexuality education, programs that are effective in helping to stop the spread of HIV, sexually transmitted infection, as well as unintended pregnancy.

The proposed legislation would establish a competitive grant program, administered by the department of health for the implementation of comprehensive, age appropriate sex education. This is vitally important as currently NYS has no dedicated funding stream for comprehensive sex education in schools. Abstinence-only sex education, which is heavily funded, should not be the only message students hear. This bill presents localities with the opportunity to offer a fuller picture of sexual and reproductive health.

With 40% of adolescents in New York State already engaged in sexual activity, rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI) in New York State are among the highest in the country.

- In New York State there were nearly 40,000 teenage pregnancies in 2005 among 15-19 year-olds (New York State Department of Health)
- The highest rates of gonorrhea are among 15-19 year-olds (NYSDOH)
- Nationally, half of all new HIV infections are among young people under the age of 25 (Centers for Disease Control)

According to Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS), "Sexuality education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs, and values. It includes sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image, and gender roles. Sexuality education begins at home. Parents and caregivers are—and ought to be—the primary sexuality educators of their children. School-based comprehensive sexuality education, however, can add to the education young people receive from their families. Such programs respect the diversity of values and beliefs represented in the community and help young people mature into sexually healthy adults.¹"

The Healthy Teens Act would create a funding source for schools and communities to provide age-appropriate programs so that young people can learn how to protect themselves, build self-esteem, learn negotiation and refusal skills and become better equipped to face an increasingly sexualized world propelled by mass media.

GMHC strongly supports the proposed legislation and urges passage of this bill.

¹SIECUS Community Action Kit, *Get The Facts NY website*.

http://www.communityactionkit.org/pdfs/Learning_The_Basics/3_What_is_Comprehensive_Se.pdf