



**TESTIMONY OF GLBTQ LEGAL ADVOCATES & DEFENDERS
IN SUPPORT OF H.7166**

Rhode Island House Committee on Education
February 2, 2022

Dear Chair McNamara, First Vice Chair Barros, Second Vice Chair Amore and Members of the Rhode Island House Committee on Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.7166. This bill will require schools that offer sexual health education to use curricula that acknowledge and affirm individuals with a variety of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. In doing so, the Act is critical to ensuring that this important health and wellness curricula is inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ youth, which promotes the well-being of LGBTQ youth and safety and inclusion in general in our schools.

GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (“GLAD”) is a nonprofit organization working within New England and nationally to end discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and HIV status through strategic litigation, public policy advocacy, and education. GLAD’s youth work focuses on interventions, litigation, policy, legislation and public education designed to ensure that LGBTQ youth are fully included and affirmed in all realms, particularly in schools, the child welfare system, and the juvenile justice system.

All young people need accurate, medically sound, evidence-based information to learn about their sexuality, and that of others, at a particularly critical point in their sexual and psychosocial development.¹ This is particularly true for LGBTQ youth, as same-sex sexuality has historically been silenced and stigmatized, thus depriving LGBTQ youth of the same opportunity

¹ Cora C. Breuner et al., Amer. Acad. of Pediatrics, *Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents Pediatrics*, 138 Pediatrics e1, e1 (2016), <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/2/e20161348.full.pdf>.

for healthy development as their peers.² Sex education curriculum that includes information about sexual orientation and gender identity doesn't just teach LGBTQ students about their sexuality, it also educates all students that same-sex sexual expression is a normal part of human sexuality.

This Act would signal that students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are welcomed and supported in Rhode Island schools and would aid students in realizing that they are not alone. Other states, including California,³ Oregon,⁴ and New Jersey,⁵ require that sex education be LGBTQ-inclusive. By helping all students better understand concepts related to sexual orientation and gender identities, inclusive sex education dispels harmful stereotypes, decreases bullying, and improves LGBTQ students' experiences. Additionally, inclusive curricula help all students feel safer regardless of their own sexual orientation or gender identity.⁶

Furthermore, Rhode Island students—including LGBTQ students—require and deserve access to medically accurate information about their sexual health. Multiple studies have shown that sex education supports positive health outcomes in teens and encourages safe sexual practices.⁷ This is especially important for LGBTQ youth, who are significantly more likely than their non-LGBTQ counterparts to be diagnosed with HIV or contract another STI. These rates are highest for transgender people, who contract HIV at four times the national average, and men who

² Hannah Slater, *LGBT-Inclusive Sex Education Means Healthier Youth and Safer Schools* (2013) <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/news/2013/06/21/67411/lgbt-inclusive-sex-education-means-healthier-youth-and-safer-schools/>.

³ California Healthy Youth Act, Cal. Educ. Code § 51930–51939.

⁴ Or. Admin. R. 581-022-2050.

⁵ N.J. Dep't of Educ., Student Learning Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education (2014), <https://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/2014/chpe/standards.pdf>.

⁶ Mass. Dep't of Elementary & Secondary Educ., Principles for Ensuring Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Students, at 2 (2015), <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/lgbtq/LearningEnvironments.pdf>; see also Cal. Safe Sch. Comm'n, Safe Schools Research Brief 4: LGBT Issues in the Curriculum Promotes School Safety (2006), <http://www.casafeschools.org/FactSheet-curriculum.pdf>.

⁷ See, e.g., Advocates for Youth, Comprehensive Sex Education and Academic Success (2010), https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/storage/advfy/documents/comprehensive_sex_education_and_academic_success.pdf; Nat'l Ass'n of Sch. Nurses, Position Statement: Sexual Health Education in Schools (2016), <https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASN/3870c72d-fff9-4ed7-833f-215de278d256/UploadedImages/PDFs/Position%20Statements/17pssexualhealth.pdf>.

have sex with men, who account for about two-thirds of HIV and syphilis cases.⁸ Therefore, in order for LGBTQ youth to obtain the positive health outcomes associated with sex education, Rhode Island must ensure that it provides programs designed for students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. H.7166 would help accomplish this goal.

Through this Act, Rhode Island will ensure that LGBTQ students are included and supported at school while simultaneously improving these students' access to crucial sexual health information. As such, GLAD strongly supports H.7166. If you have any further questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,



Patience Crozier, Senior Staff Attorney
GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders
pcrozier@glad.org

⁸ Hannah Slater, *LGBT-Inclusive Sex Education Means Healthier Youth and Safer Schools* (2013) <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt-rights/news/2013/06/21/67411/lgbt-inclusive-sex-education-means-healthier-youth-and-safer-schools/>.