



DIOCESE of LACROSSE

December 28, 2009
Feast of the Holy Innocents

OFFICE OF THE
BISHOP

Dear Parents,

I am writing to you with regard to a matter of grave concern. Children in Wisconsin's public schools face new threats under the guise of a "Healthy Youth Act" that would govern sex education for grades kindergarten to 12. This bill has passed the Assembly and is currently being debated in the Senate.

Senate Bill 324 undermines the judgment of parents and local advisory committees and school boards, replacing that judgment with state mandates. By mandating top-down decisions about the physical, emotional and moral well-being of our youth, it radically intrudes into the values of the local community. It does this at the *expense* of that local community, substituting itself for the local control of parents and advisory and school boards in the delicate area of human growth and development. By contrast, the state's current law recognizes the vital role of parents in providing moral guidance to their children and gives local school boards the discretion to create educational programs that are best suited to the needs of their students and communities.

Current law prudently requires that abstinence be presented as the very best behavior choice for unmarried students. It also allows local communities to teach "comprehensive sex education," which includes information on contraception. By contrast, the new bill would deemphasize the value of abstinence by mandating any Wisconsin public school that teaches human growth and development to do so through "comprehensive sex education" alone. Under the proposed legislation, youth as young as middle school may likely be given instruction on how to access and properly use condoms and contraception. In a sexualized culture drowning in permissive messages that have led to skyrocketing rates of teen sexual activity, pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease in American society, it is wrong for the state to force such an approach on local communities, whether they agree with it or not.

The detachment of sex education from instruction on marriage and parental responsibility can also be clearly seen in the bill. Under current law, instruction on human growth and development is to include instruction on marriage and parental responsibility in the same course during the same year. The new bill being debated states only that instruction on marriage and parental responsibility should be

3710 EAST AVENUE, S.
P.O. BOX 4004
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
54602-4004

608.788.7700
FAX 608.788.4689

provided. This allows the possibility that instruction on marriage and parental responsibility could be missed and/or be disconnected from the whole array of values-neutral messages conveyed in the sex education component. Students will be left with training in using others for sexual pleasure – with “health” defined as the use of protective means to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases – rather than reserving complete, self-giving love to a husband and wife in the commitment of marriage.

Moreover, the pending bill shows a bias against abstinence education by demanding that in order for federal funds to be sought for teen pregnancy prevention, school programs must demonstrate an increase in contraceptive use. Parents and local communities should not be forced to adopt this ideological definition of health for their children.

As an example of this ideology at work, consider the provision that an instructional program in human growth and development must “not promote bias against...sexually active pupils.” And yet this so-called “bias”, which is actually proper protection for minors who are making harmful choices, is reflected in Wisconsin Statute 948.02(2), which states, “(w)hoever has sexual contact or sexual intercourse with a person who has not attained the age of 16 years is guilty of a Class C felony.” What sort of mixed message does the state want to send?

If local communities believe instruction that reflects a “bias” against teen sexual activity is really a good thing, – really in the *best* interest of their children’s health – that should be their prerogative, as allowed by current law.

This bill is a misguided effort to define and shape the health and, implicitly, the moral vision, of our young people and the communities in which they live. I ask you to oppose it. May I encourage you to read the enclosed information provided by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference? Please call or write your state senator and/or representative. You may obtain their names and addresses by going on-line; type in Wisconsin State Legislature; click on Who Represents Me and the information will be provided when you type in your address or the site where you vote. Click on the picture of the senator/representative and the address and phone number will be provided Thank you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Jerome E. Listecky

Most Rev. Jerome E. Listecky
Bishop of La Crosse

Enclosure