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Testimony in Opposition to Assembly Bill 458
Assembly Committee on Education
By Julaine K. Appling, President
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Thank you, Chairman Pope-Roberts and other committee members, for this opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 458.

My name is Julaine Appling. I am president of Wisconsin Family Action, a statewide pro-family organization that educates, informs and advocates on behalf of Wisconsin citizens regarding legislative and cultural issues that impact our families. Wisconsin Family Action represents tens of thousands of families all across this state that very much care about bills such as the one under discussion today.

Many of these families would be here today. The extremely short notice regarding this hearing makes that virtually impossible, as it is obviously difficult for families to rearrange work schedules at the last minute and plan a trip to Madison on a work day, a trip that may require hours of travel time. It is unfortunate that the authors and committee leadership have chosen to functionally deny many citizens input on this important issue.

Wisconsin Family Action is opposed to Assembly Bill 458 and urges all committee members to take the same position. We are opposed to this bill for many reasons, but I will contain my comments today to just five (5) key points. As a general comment, we do believe the name given to this bill by its lead sponsors is not in any way accurate. It will not promote healthy youth; quite the contrary. It will promote unhealthy youth.

1. Assembly Bill 458 removes the possibility that any school district in Wisconsin that chooses to have a Human Growth and Development program can elect to have one that is abstinence-centered. It condemns all school districts to the so-called “comprehensive sex education” approach that has been responsible for the crisis that we currently have in unprecedented rates of sexually transmitted diseases among our teens and increasing teen pregnancies. In fact, this is the very crisis that the authors and co-sponsors of this bill now claim this provision will address.

How more of the same, much more of the same, will solve the crisis created by this approach to sexual education is beyond me. It is not lost on us that these mandates essentially make the required Human Growth and Development committees a joke. Why even bother with the sham of a committee, when a committee is powerless to create a HG&D program that is truly of its choice—one that is abstinence-centered, for instance, or even the so-called abstinence-based programs currently in many school districts. An abstinence-centered program is not the “just say no” approach; it’s an effective, evidence-based, scientifically accurate, age-appropriate, risk-avoidance program.

Abstinence-centered curricula do not ignore the temptations, expectations, risks and facts of teen sexuality—they incorporate those facts into comprehensive programs centered on abstinence education. Abstinence-centered programs give kids a road map for their future, help them set goals and identify and learn the skills they need to get there without sacrificing their happiness and health. It’s a holistic approach to this important subject, one that considers the intellectual, physical, emotional, social and overall well-being of teens. Such programs truly promote “healthy youth.”

2. Assembly Bill 458 is an affront to parents and their desire to stay informed about what their children are learning in school. Changing the way and times when a school district's HG&D curriculum and instructional materials are available to parents does not help parents be engaged with the education of their children. This bill requires that if parents want to "inspect" the curriculum and the instructional materials, they must do so prior to implementation. At least as important is that taking out the word *all* in reference to what instructional materials parents may inspect, leads one to conclude that school officials may purposely omit certain materials they do not parents to see. Nothing, absolutely nothing that happens in a school classroom should be kept from parents who want to know.
3. Assembly Bill 458 removes the current requirement that marriage and parental responsibility must be taught in the same course and same year as particular HG&D subjects. This requirement links sexual behavior appropriately to marriage. If the sponsors of this measure are in earnest about reversing trends in youth regarding sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies, then they will reinstate these requirements because linking sexual activity to marriage is one of the best ways to reduce unintended teen pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Even from just a purely economic standpoint, this bill is bad public policy. According to a first-ever report published last year by the Institute for American Values births to unwed mothers and fractured families cost Wisconsin taxpayers, at a minimum, \$737 million every year.
4. Assembly Bill 458 removes the current requirement that abstinence from sexual activity must be presented as the preferred behavior choice for all unmarried students. Once again, we are removing sexual activity from the bonds of marriage. While under this proposal students will be told, in the language of the bill, "the benefits" of abstinence, they will not hear it in its proper context—abstinence until marriage. The message will be lost in the cacophony of comprehensive sex ed voices extolling the alleged "health benefits" and explaining the proper use of condoms and other contraceptive drugs and devices. I would submit to this committee that there is no health benefit in premarital sexual activity.
5. Removing the stipulation that a volunteer health-care provider that comes into a school must not address such issues as family-planning, reproduction, HIV and AIDS, among some other select topics, means that so-called family-planning organizations are being given free and open access to present basically whatever they want to in our public school classrooms to a captive audience. It is hardly any wonder that the state's major family planning organizations are heartily behind this bill; it is a dream-come-true for them.

There is much more in AB 458 that we object to. However these five points highlight some of the egregious problems and illustrate why we refuse to use the misleading title given this bill. We believe this measure would result in decidedly unhealthy youth and will actually encourage teen sexual activity. Increased teen sexual activity will ultimately result in more teen pregnancies and high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and infections. How do we know that? Because we have a track record that shows that this is the result of "comprehensive sex ed" programs, such as the one being proposed in AB 458. Surely our youth deserve better than a program that is far more about the "health" of family-planning organizations than it is about the health of our young people.

Wisconsin Family Action urges you to vote no on Assembly Bill 458.

Thank you for your time today.