

March 1, 2024

Members of the Senate Education Policy Committee
Via Electronic Delivery



Re: Letter in Support of Senate File 3746

Chair Cwodinski and Members of the Education Policy Committee:

The Minnesota Youth Activist Alliance submits this letter to express our support for Senate File 3746. We are writing on behalf of Advocates for Youth, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that partners with youth leaders, adult allies, and youth-serving organizations to advocate for policies and champion programs that recognize young people's rights to honest sexual health information; accessible, confidential, and affordable sexual health services; and the resources and opportunities necessary to create sexual health equity for all youth. The Minnesota Youth Activist Alliance is a project of Advocates for Youth, led by young people between the ages of 14 and 24 committed to the fight for reproductive freedoms in Minnesota.

Today, we are writing in support of Senate File 3746, which would designate the commissioner of education to begin the rulemaking process to adopt statewide academic standards in health. The establishment of such standards would take actionable steps toward ensuring that all Minnesotans are equipped with the knowledge and skills to attain their highest level of health. Furthermore, these standards aim to center the wellbeing of young people and provide the necessary tools for them to exercise their bodily autonomy and make informed decisions regarding their health and well-being.

Young people are at risk of continued health hazards such as disease, psychological stressors, substance misuse, violence, and more without these standards. In addition, sexual health disparities persist among youth who are LGBTQ+ and/or from communities of color. Thirty years of public health research clearly demonstrates that young people benefit from receiving LGBTQ+ inclusive, medically accurate, and developmentally- and age-appropriate sex education. Honest, inclusive sex education curricula has been shown to reduce the rates of STI's, unplanned pregnancies, and sexual assault. The development of these standards will create a state where young Minnesotans can live freely and safely.

"Inclusive sex education holds a deeply personal significance for me due to being a child of teen parents. My mother gave birth to me at the age of 14, and I saw firsthand the challenges she encountered as a result. She faced significant stigma and was ostracized by institutions such as her school instead of receiving the support and care she needed during such a vulnerable time. This experience made me acutely aware of the negative consequences that can arise from the lack of access to accurate information about reproductive health that prevented her to have the autonomy to make informed choices for herself." - Yamalí Rodas Figueroa

"As a young Queer individual, inclusive and comprehensive sex education is crucial to my health and wellbeing. Growing up in Minnesota I felt deprived of a sexual education curriculum that had my health and interests in mind. I was not shown options for keeping myself and my Queer community safe and informed. At the time of my schooling, I didn't feel I had any options or that there was any support for my LGBTQ+ identity and health. My experience with a lack of accessible and diverse sexual education and reproductive health drives me to advocate for this information to be offered for youth today. It is not only uplifting for people of all identities but absolutely necessary in protecting the health and safety of all." - Tori Westenberg

As a youth-and-student-led organization, we understand that establishing statewide health standards will empower the youth of Minnesota to lead safer and healthier lives and have long-term benefits in



communities across the state. The Minnesota Youth Activist Alliance respectfully requests your support for Senate File 3746.

In Community,
Tori Westenberg
Yamalí Rodas Figueroa
Lead Organizers, Minnesota Youth Activist Alliance