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LD 254

For three years, I was a sex and consent educator with Speak About It, where I toured across the country using performance based education to teach high school and college students about healthy relationships and safe sex. Throughout my tours, countless students would talk to me after the lesson about how vital it was hear experiences from LGBTQ and questioning people who were in the same phase of life as them. They felt seen, they felt represented. Not only that, but several students would come to me and share that they learned something new about their own sexuality by giving them the language to describe it. Often times, this came from folks who had never heard of the term 'asexual' before. I cherish those moments when students not only gain tools for engaging with safe, responsible and respectful intimacy but also learn more about themselves and the people they will encounter in their life. It makes for a better society when we are more aware of our differences and the vast uniqueness of each individual.

I also taught the Our Whole Lives curriculum to middle schoolers through the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Portland for a year. This curriculum is some of the best out there at the moment. It gives an array of information, scenarios, and is culturally diverse. I found the diversity to be so important because, even though these students weren't anywhere near their first sexual experience, they were presented with the possibilities of what their first relationship could be like: healthy, safe, and enjoyable with the right partner and at the right time for them. Because even if a kid won't be using that information until their older, it's important to still have the knowledge. When you're considering an important question like "am I ready to have sex?" or "am I ready to date?" you can never know if you're fully ready if you don't have all the information. We want our kids to grow into adults that are fully informed with the knowledge that will keep them safe, even if their decision is not to have sex at all.

For a little less than a year, I taught elementary school kids through the Sexual Assault Response Services of Southern Maine. In the youngest of age groups, we would discuss the very basics of consent. This is vital information for growing kids to remain safe and healthy. Sadly, we do live in a world where adults harm kids and kids harm one another. Violating a child's consent can cause long lasting psychological damage, especially if that comes from an adult they once trusted. A child needs to be taught that certain kinds of interactions with adults are not normal or safe for them. They need to be taught to tell trusted adults when someone is mistreating them so the abuse can stop. Age appropriate, comprehensive and inclusive sex ed is not only what Maine kids need, it's what they deserve. The better the education is, the more likely we can keep our kids safe and healthy.

This funding is so necessary I want to commend the writers of this bill for including such a robust amount of funding to support the implementation of this bill. During my time with SARSSM, our one day of teaching the students was not fitting the current elementary level requirements for the state but schools were not given any additional funding to do so. Without this funding, it will be impossible to implement, as schools are already stretched thin and failing to meet current demands from the state.

Maine needs and deserves comprehensive sex education with adequate funding to back it up. I urge the legislature to pass this bill.