

Kathleen Paradis
Montville
LD 217

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Kathy Paradis, and I am here to testify in very strong support of LD 217, An Act to Require Schools to Provide Access to Free Condoms for Students in Grades 9 to 12 in the School Nurse's Office. As a former Community Educator for Maine Family Planning, Sexual Assault Advocate, and Family Teacher living in a residential setting with eight teenage girls, I witnessed directly the impact of not having access to sexual health information or barriers methods.

Between a lack of transportation, the stigma around purchasing condoms and the difficulty of doing it in front of a parent or caregiver, the cost of condoms, and many other barriers, accessing condoms is a huge issue for young people. And not having condoms will usually not deter young people "in the moment".

In many parts of Europe, it is normalized that young people always have condoms on them and they're available in vending machines. Naturally, their rates of STIs and pregnancies are much lower. In fact, according to our own CDC, the United States' teen pregnancy rate is almost three times that of Germany and France, and over four times that of the Netherlands. Source:

(<https://npin.cdc.gov/publication/adolescent-sexual-health-europe-and-us-why-difference>)

Having access to condoms does not encourage young people to have sex. However, denying them access to condoms does risk their health. I support LD 217, and also request that committee members amend the bill to make it more equitable and impactful by changing the language to say that condoms can be accessed in the school nurse's office "or locations authorized by the school nurse."

Maine's young people deserve nonjudgmental access to condoms. For the health and safety of our youth, I urge the Committee to please vote YES on LD 217.

Thank you,
Kathy Paradis
Freedom, Me