



Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Lisa Margulies, I serve as Vice President of Public Affairs, Maine, for Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, and I am pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 217.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care in approximately 10,000 visits per year in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford, and Topsham, as well as online via telehealth. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, behavioral health care, abortion care, gender-affirming care, as well as a variety of primary care services.

As a mission driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to access affordable, high quality sexual and reproductive health care in their communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make, and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality. All people deserve to access comprehensive reproductive health care, including abortion and gender-affirming care, free from shame, stigma, and intimidation. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide more than \$1.2 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine. For many, we are their only access to the health care system.

Young people in Maine are having sex, and many are doing so without protecting themselves and their partners. According to the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, more than 50% of students are sexually active by grade 12,ⁱ with more than 40% of 12th graders reporting sexual intercourse with at least one partner in the last 3 monthsⁱⁱ; however, only around half of sexually active Maine students report condom use during their last sexual encounter.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, Maine's STI rates have climbed sharply, with rates of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis all increasing significantly in recent years.^{iv} And we know that young people are particularly at risk: in 2022, nearly half of all reported cases of these diseases nationally occurred in people aged 15-24.^v

Providing free condoms in school is one simple, relatively low-cost, and effective solution. Research shows that school-based condom access programs, such as the one proposed by LD 217, work. In fact, a 2019 meta-analysis of 29 articles from six countries found clear positive outcomes across the board, with most studies showing an increase in condom utilization and all studies that examined STIs showing a marked decrease in STI symptoms and rates.^{vi} No studies found that condom access programs increased sexual activity or sexual partners, or that they lowered the age at which young people first had sex.^{vii} The overwhelmingly positive impact of condom access programs is one of the reasons why such programs have been publicly supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics for more than a decade.^{viii}



Maine’s young people deserve healthy starts to their sexual and reproductive lives, with tools at their disposal to protect themselves and their peers. Providing access to condoms for students is one straightforward and low-cost step that allows them to be in control of their health and wellbeing. LD 217 makes a prudent investment in public health and in doing invests in the future of our state. For all these reasons, I ask the committee to vote Ought to Pass as Amended on this bill.

ⁱ “2023 MIYHS High School Report,” *Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey 2023*, Maine Dept. of Health and Human Services/Maine Dept. of Education, October 13, 2023, pg.661, https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/sites/default/files/2023_Reports/Detailed_Reports/HS/MIYHS2023_Detailed_Reports_HS_State/Maine%20High%20School%20Detailed%20Tables.pdf

ⁱⁱ Ibid. pg. 684

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. pg. 693

^{iv} Bradley, Grace “STI spikes in Maine show the importance of testing”, *WABI5*, September 3, 2024, <https://www.wabi.tv/2024/09/03/sti-spikes-maine-show-importance-testing/>

^v “The State of STIs — CDC Reports an Alarming Rise in Syphilis”, *American Sexual Health Association*, January 30, 2024, <https://www.ashasexualhealth.org/the-state-of-stis-cdc-reports-an-alarming-rise-in-syphilis/>

^{vi} Algur, Eda, Wang, Elin, Friedman, Howard, Deperthes, Bidia, “A Systematic Global Review of Condom Availability Programs in High Schools”, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, March 2019, [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(18\)30798-5/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(18)30798-5/fulltext)

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} American Academy of Pediatrics “Policy Statement: Condom Use by Adolescents”, *Pediatrics*, November 2013, <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/132/5/973/31740/Condom-Use-by-Adolescents>