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Senator John Rafferty, Representative Kelly Murphy, Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

The Maine Section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) writes today in support of L.D. 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. Modern contraceptives are very effective when used correctly and, thus, effective counseling regarding contraceptive options, preventing sexually transmitted infections (STI), and provision of resources to increase access are key components of adolescent health care.

ACOG represents more than 60,000 physicians and partners dedicated to advancing women's health and the health of individuals seeking obstetric and gynecologic care, including 148 in the Maine section. ACOG maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members; strongly advocates for equitable, exceptional, and respectful care for all women and people in need of obstetric and gynecologic care; promotes patient education; and increases awareness among its members and the public of critical issues facing patients and their families and communities.

ACOG fully supports age-appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education that includes information on abstinence as well as the full range of FDA-approved contraceptives; this is an integral and necessary component of full spectrum adolescent healthcare. ACOG advocates for policies and practices that ensure equitable, affordable, and accessible sexual health care to this population. Given the rise in incidence of STIs in Maine and the consequences of unintended teen pregnancy (disruption of education, lifelong impact on socioeconomic prospects, etc.), L.D. 217 would provide students with trusted medical professionals to discuss their contraceptive needs and a system to access condoms in a stigma-free environment at no cost, cost being one significant barrier to access. Studies have demonstrated that comprehensive sexuality education programs reduce the rates of sexual activity, sexual risk behaviors (e.g., number of partners and unprotected intercourse), sexually transmitted infections, and adolescent pregnancy; it fosters responsible decision-making and healthy outcomes. The combination of sexuality education and access to condoms will equip young Mainers to have safe sex should they choose.

We mustn't put our heads in the sand and assume that adolescent Mainers are not engaging in sexual activity. To do so is irresponsible and has serious consequences for our young citizens. L.D. 217 would provide a critical avenue for adolescent students to receive medically accurate information and resources to ensure they have the information they need to make the best decisions for themselves.

For these reasons, the Maine Section of ACOG urges this Committee to vote 'Ought to Pass" on L.D. 217.

Respectfully submitted,
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Maine Section ACOG