



Grandmothers For Reproductive Rights

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

My name is Cait Vaughan, and I am here today to testify on behalf of my employer, Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights (GRR!), and the more than 600 Maine residents we represent, in support of LD 217. GRR! is a grassroots organization that amplifies the voices and status of grandmothers and elders who work intergenerationally--through grassroots education, advocacy, and community-centered initiatives--to secure access to sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice for present and future generations.

Our organization brings together older women in their 60s, 70s, and 80s to organize and mobilize alongside young Mainers in middle school, high school, and college around issues of sexual and reproductive health. Key to our intergenerational approach is deep listening and frank conversations with young people, wherein we take seriously what is at stake for them in our current reproductive health and rights landscape, and wholeheartedly convey the importance of protecting their autonomy to shape healthy and bright futures on their own terms.

In February, GRR! visited a group of Feminist Advisory Board members with our partner organization, Hardy Girls. We provided education around this bill proposal and then engaged in open and honest conversation about their thoughts, needs, and questions around safer sex practices. These student leaders (who were meeting on a Sunday afternoon, by the way) unanimously agreed that access to condoms would NOT make them or their peers more likely to engage in sexual behaviors. They did, however, name the barriers to accessing condoms that are so common for their age group. These include cost, transportation, lack of anonymity in small town stores, and more. Several of these outstanding students have submitted written testimony in support of LD 217. I encourage you to read these with an open heart, and as you do, please recall your own youth and all the questions, fears, confusion, and embarrassments that shape the tumultuous period of adolescence.

As an organization comprised of older women who grew up during times when open conversations about sex and sexuality--especially for young girls and women--were exceedingly rare, GRR! understands the discomfort around this subject among many adults, while also remembering how desperate our younger selves were for accurate, clear information and tools. Many GRR!s have raised their own children and grandchildren, with whom we have sought to be more open than previous generations about the subject of sexual health. As much as we wish that all young people lived in homes where accurate and age-appropriate information were shared freely, we know this is not the case.

With the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey reporting that at least 35% of Maine teens are sexually active, we believe it is necessary to face facts and provide them with every possible tool to protect their health and futures by avoiding STIs and unintended pregnancy. Schools are sites of safety, education, and care for young people, and school nurses are excellent frontline healthcare providers who build trust with Maine students each day. The fiscal note for this bill is miniscule compared to the costs of STI treatment and unplanned births among teenagers. LD 217 just makes good financial and health sense.

We 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." We at Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights urge you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 217.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Vaughan

Cait Vaughan, Director of Programs & Outreach

Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights (GRR!) works, through education and advocacy, to secure access to sexual & reproductive health, rights & justice for present & future generations.