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Testimony in opposition:

LD 1716, "An Act to Require Family Life Education to Include a Human Growth and Development Curriculum"

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 28, 2025

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Laura Harper. I'm a senior associate at Moose Ridge Associates and I live in Hallowell. I am here today on behalf of my client, Maine Family Planning (MFP) to speak against LD 1716, "An Act to Require Family Life Education to Include a Human Growth and Development Curriculum."

MFP provides comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care to adults and teens through telehealth and at 19 health centers statewide. In addition to medical services, our Prevention Program promotes education around sexual and reproductive health by working with schools and community organizations to provide comprehensive sex education that is medically accurate, age-appropriate, and affirming for people of all identities. We are deeply committed to promoting sexual and reproductive health among youth and families.

Maine Law and Maine's health education standards require medically accurate and age-appropriate comprehensive family life education. Research shows that comprehensive sexual health education works, empowering youth to make healthy, informed, and responsible decisions about their bodies and relationships. Comprehensive and inclusive sex ed is critical to improve the lives and wellbeing of all young people. With comprehensive sex education, teens are more likely to wait longer to engage in sexual activity and use protection when they become sexually active. Our education staff work closely with the Maine CDC and Maine Department of Education (DOE) to support school and community educators statewide to implement evidence-based teaching materials including *Puberty Happens* for youth in grades 4-6; the *Middle School Scope and Sequence* for grades 6-8; and our *Best Practices in STI/HIV and Pregnancy Prevention* for youth aged 13-18. These curricula are factual, inclusive, and align with state and national health education standards. They include topics ranging from bodily autonomy and consent, STI/HIV and pregnancy prevention, and relationship safety.

Our work is based on the belief that young people achieve brighter, healthier futures when they have the knowledge and skills to navigate sexual and relationship issues. Young people are capable

of making healthy choices and want adults in their lives to talk to them about sex and relationships. When we do not step up, youth find answers to their questions elsewhere. Consider the 2022 Common Sense Media study on Teens and Pornography that found 73% of teens aged 13-17 have accessed porn online. More than half reported seeing pornography before the age of 13. Maine teens tell us that they are not receiving adequate information in school that is relevant in helping them make healthy sexual decisions, and the education they receive can vary widely by school or district. The best way to address these disparities is *not* by a prescribed 3 minute video with specifics on fetal development including brain, heart, sex organs and other vital organs. Nor is a right to civil action for Maine's Attorney General to sue teachers if they don't play such a video in their class.

Maine's current Comprehensive Family Life Education law works and we can be proud of our commitment to comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education. MFP's Prevention Program has seen an increasing demand for professional development and resources that support youth from puberty through high school and early adulthood. Last fall we faced a funding gap and instead of reducing services, we raised private funds to cover our losses. This isn't sustainable and Maine has historically shared the commitment to providing these services. Instead of adding arbitrary requirements and definitions along with scare tactics aimed at teachers, why not invest in what we know is working?

In closing, we ask you to join us in supporting our young peoples' future, one where everyone feels empowered with factual information about their own bodies and has the ability to choose the future best for them. Please vote LD 1716, "ought not to pass."

Thank you for your attention and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.