

EXHIBIT NO. 7
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March 6, 2013

Senate Public Health Welfare and Safety Committee
Montana Senate
PO Box 200500
Helena, Montana 59620-0500

Dear Committee Members,

Sexuality education occurs for young people in many places: at home, at church, in school, with their peers and in the culture that surrounds them. Messages from these different sources vary widely. Young people prefer to learn about sexuality from their parents. However, many parents do not meet this responsibility. Not providing this education to all students in school will lead youth to seek information from sources that may not be accurate or support healthy decisions. The opt-in requirement of this bill will not serve our children well.

This bill also seeks to prohibit some educators from providing sexuality education in schools. Through my career in health education I have provided sexuality education in many venues with youth and adults and have partnered with many other educators. The health educators at Planned Parenthood are my most knowledgeable and valued colleagues. They are skilled at providing accurate, non-biased education. Health enhancement teachers invite us into their classrooms to supplement their work with students because we are experts in our field.

There has been a decrease in teen pregnancy nationally. In Montana we have not seen this decline. Chlamydia rates among Montana teens continue to rise. We need to work together to better encourage our youth toward decisions that will protect their health.

If parents do not take the responsibility to provide accurate and ongoing support for healthy decisions and schools are prohibited from providing the best education for all students, how will our youth get the facts and support they need?

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Mentch
Health Educator