

February 4, 2022

Senator Shelley B. Mayer
Chair
Senate Education Committee
509 Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12247

Assembly Member Michael Benedetto
Chair
Assembly Education Committee
836 Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Capitol Building, Room 330
Albany, NY 12247

Speaker Carl Heastie
932 Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Chair Mayer, Chair Benedetto, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, and Speaker Heastie:

On behalf of the undersigned sexual violence prevention, reproductive health, LGBTQ, and civil rights advocates and health care providers, we urge you to co-sponsor S.2584-A/A.6616 and to advance the bill through the Education Committees. This critically important measure would require public and charter schools to teach age appropriate, medically accurate, and inclusive sex education in grades K-12. Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) is about so much more than the birds and the bees: it is a critical tool for building a culture of consent, preventing sexual assault and violence, promoting inclusive school communities, and improving educational outcomes.

CSE has been proven to reduce sexual harassment and violence. This past summer, New Yorkers were horrified to learn the details of Andrew Cuomo's sexual harassment of staff – the latest #MeToo affront as we continue to grapple with the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and violence in our state and nationwide. Governor Hochul has promised a new day in Albany – one that will be harassment-free. Passing CSE is an important step legislators can take now to prevent sexual harassment in our classrooms and communities. In fact, it is the only upstream tool available to prevent sexual harassment before it occurs.

There is no time to lose. Nationally, more than two thirds of teenagers who are or have been in a relationship report experiencing some form of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.¹ In New York, about 10 percent of teenagers reported experiencing physical dating violence.² Studies show that violence in adolescent relationships sets the stage for violence

¹ Taylor, B.G. & Mumford, E.A. *A National Descriptive Portrait of Adolescent Relationship Abuse: Results From the National Survey on Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence*, *The Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2016, 31(6), 963-988, *available at*: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514564070>.

² Vagi, K. J., Olsen, E. O. M., Basile, K. C., & Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., *Teen dating violence (physical and sexual) among US high school students: findings from the 2013 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2015, *JAMA Pediatrics*, 169 (5), 474-482; see also *Teen Dating Violence*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mar. 12, 2019, *available at*: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teendatingviolence/fastfact.html>.

in future relationships, including intimate partner violence and sexual violence perpetration.³

New Yorkers can agree that we want all youth to have the knowledge to keep themselves healthy and safe. CSE teaches students about bodily autonomy, personal boundaries, privacy, and how to tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. It instills in students of all ages empathy and respect for each other and lets students know where and how to get help if they are being abused or harassed. In fact, a study by Columbia University demonstrated that CSE in high school can help prevent sexual assault in college.⁴

CSE not only helps prevent sexual violence but can also help reduce harassment and bullying in schools. It promotes respect and inclusion by helping young people understand sexual orientation and gender identity through lesson plans and activities inclusive of, and relevant to, LGBTQ youth.⁵

It is widely known that CSE also supports youth in delaying the onset of sexual activity, and when teens do become sexually active, CSE programs lead to improved protective behaviors for reducing pregnancy and STIs, including having fewer partners, better communication with partners about risk, and more consistent condom use.⁶

Finally, the social and emotional competencies cultivated through CSE improve educational outcomes, and CSE results in cost savings for the state. A 2015 CDC-led meta-analysis demonstrated that social-emotional skills programs led to significant reductions in dropout rates, from an average of 21.1% in control groups to 10.2% in program groups.⁷

³ *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf>.

⁴ John S. Santelli et al., *Does sex education before college protect students from sexual assault in college*, 13 PLOS ONE 11 (2018).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Comprehensive Sex Education: Research and Results*, Advocates for Youth, available at: <https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/storage/advfy/documents/fscse.pdf>; In 2012 a CDC study found that “comprehensive risk reduction programs” (including contraception and/or condom information in addition to abstinence) have positive behavioral effects, including a 40 percent increase in contraception and condom use and a 40 percent reduction in unprotected sex, as well as a reduction to the rate of unintended pregnancy, Chin, et al., *The Effectiveness of Group-Based Comprehensive Risk-Reduction and Abstinence Education Interventions to Prevent or Reduce the Risk of Adolescent Pregnancy, Human Immunodeficiency Virus, and Sexually Transmitted Infections: Two Systematic Reviews for the Guide to Community Preventive Services*, American Journal of Preventive Medicine 42.3 (2012): 272-294.

⁷ See *LGBT Youth*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm> (citing Hahn, et al., *Programs to Increase High School Completion: A Community Guide Systematic Health Equity Review*, American Journal of Preventive Medicine 48.5 (May 2015): 599–608; Wilson, et al., *Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs: Effects on School Completion and Dropout among School-aged Children and Youth*, Campbell Systematic Reviews 7.8 (2011)).

Additionally, for every dollar invested in CSE, the state stands to save \$2.65 by reducing poor health outcomes alone.⁸

S.2584-A/A.6616 is a common-sense measure that requires the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Health and a broad range of experts, to create a CSE program that includes model curricula to ensure easier implementation for districts and resources for teachers to support implementation. Districts and schools maintain flexibility to teach the curriculum that is right for their student population so long as it meets the standards included in the Commissioner's curriculum.

There has always been a need for CSE in New York State, but the latest statewide reckoning on sexual harassment has underscored the urgency. We urge you to co-sponsor and work to advance S.2584-A/A.6616 this session.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Quality Education
Ardsley Democratic Committee
Bedford Democratic Committee
Bethlehem NY Indivisible
BKForge: Brooklyn for Reproductive and Gender Equity
Brookhaven Democrats Progressive Caucus
Butternut Valley Indivisible
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
CcoHope Indivisible
CD17 Indivisible
Citizen Action of New York
Community Health Care Association of NYS
Community Health Worker Network of Buffalo (CHWN Buffalo)
Community Network for Engagement, Connection & Transformation (CoNECT)
Cortlandt Democratic Committee
Croton Democratic Committee
Day One
Dobbs Ferry Democratic Committee
Downtown Women for Change
Equality New York
Erie County Green Party
Girls Inc of Westchester County
Girls for Gender Equity
Green Party of Brooklyn
Green Party of Nassau County
Greenburgh Democratic Town Committee
Harrison Democratic Committee

⁸ Wang, et al., *Economic evaluation of Safer Choices: a school-based human immunodeficiency virus, other sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy prevention program*, Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2000 Oct;154(10):1017-24, available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11030854>.

Hispanic Democrats of Westchester
Hope's Door
Housing Works
Indivisible Nation BK
Indivisible Rochester
Indivisible Scarsdale
IndivisibleWeStand UWS
Indivisible Westchester
Indivisible Westchester Districts 6 & 7
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Irvington Democratic Committee
Larchmont/Mamaroneck Indivisible
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NARAL NY Action Council
National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network, Inc.
National Council of Jewish Women New York
New Pride Agenda
New Rochelle Democratic Committee
New York Birth Control Access Project
New York City Lawyers' Committee Against Domestic Violence
New York Civil Liberties Union
New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
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North Castle Democratic Committee
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Pelham NY Democratic Committee
Planned Parenthood of Central and Western New York
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Planned Parenthood Hudson Peconic
Planned Parenthood North County NY
Progressive Schenectady
Progressive Women of New York
Progressive Women of Pelham
Rivertowns Votes
SafeBAE
Safe Horizon
Smithtown
Stop the Shaming
Sustainable Health Solutions
The Loft LGBTQ+ Community Center

The National Institute for Reproductive Health
Town of Mamaroneck Democratic Committee
UP2US
Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood
Urban Word NYC
WCLA - Choice Matters
We Are One Sullivan
Westchester For Change
Westchester National Organization for Women
Westchester Women's Agenda
Women to the Front (WTTF)
Working Families Party – Westchester/Putnam Chapter

CC. Members of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees