Testimony in Support of SB 121

Senate Education Committee

October 1. 2019

Submitted by Kelli Arthur Hykes

Chairwoman Lehner and members of the Senate Education Committee, my name is Kelli Arthur Hykes. In a past professional role, I came before many members of this legislature advocating for comprehensive statewide health education standards as a public health practitioner. But today, I come before you as the parent of two sons in the Hilliard School District.

It disappoints me that Ohio’s 600 school districts have such varied health education standards. Too many students are missing out on developing critical skills that will enhance their ability to live long, healthy, active lives.

As a graduation requirement, Ohio law simply requires that students must receive 60 hours of health education in high school. This includes drug, alcohol, and tobacco use prevention education, but does not give any guidance on what benchmarks will be used to determine if students have learned the intended lessons.

Unfortunately, the current law also doesn’t have any specific requirements for younger students. However, we know that the sooner we can teach our children the skills to make decisions that can impact their health, the more likely they are to make choices that produce better health outcomes.

This bill will require the State Board of Education to adopt health education standards, that can then be evaluated. The local school districts will have the guidance they need to choose curriculum that will meet these goals and the local community needs. Without this change, Ohio will remain the only state without statewide health education standards.

Ideally, the State Board of Education will adopt The National Health Education Standards for Pre-Kindergarten to 12th Grade that have been presented and vetted by the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America). These eight standards focus on developing and demonstrating critical thinking, interpersonal communication, decision-making, goal setting, and evaluation skills.

I would prefer to see this legislation include the authority for the Board of Education to set minimum standards for sexual health education, as well. However, I understand that for political reasons comprehensive health education reforms have failed when they include changes to venereal disease education. As much as I want my children to have comprehensive sex education in school, I do not want to see it get in the way of progress. Progress that is necessary for the long-term health of our children and our communities.

With this in mind, I urge your support for SB 121. Thank you.