Dear Senate Education Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for SB 121 and the importance of health education standards for Ohio. I am a health education and physical education teacher from Miamisburg High School and a parent to 2 young girls. I have been teaching for 11 years, and 9 of those have been teaching health education to middle school and high school students. The goal of my testimony is to share multiple, important reasons why Ohio should finally become the 50th state with health education standards.

**Why health education standards?**

The quality of school health education has severely declined over the years and will continue to do so without state standards. I remember when I was told by my district that it was no longer going to have health at the middle school level and only at the high school, because it wasn’t required. I couldn’t believe it. I was shocked and saddened, these students will be missing out on important wellness information that should be acquired earlier than high school. As a student, I remember having some form of health in middle school and then the required class at the high school level. Health Education is essential because it is my experience that many parents do not inform, let alone teach their children much if any form of health education at home. Many parents believe it is taught at school, unaware that health is not a required course until high school. So these unknowing children are left to make adult choices and uninformed decisions, unable to deal with situations put in front of them because Ohio doesn’t feel it is necessary to educate them with the knowledge and skills to be healthy.

As a health education teacher having measurable standards for health to follow would make my efforts more effective. The reason of need for state standards has changed over the years and it will only continue to fluctuate as student and community needs change. Developing clear expectations for student learning would clarify the essential knowledge and skills in the numerous state-mandated topics in health education.

Required information by the state is becoming overwhelming in the classroom. My district only requires health for a semester (18 weeks) at the high school. The state requirements overwhelm the local curriculum and I barely have time to “really” reach our students. These topics are currently disconnected topics, health education standards would link them together with a focus on the necessary skills to make healthy choices.

Ohio is the ONLY state without health education standards. Health education is the only state required academic content area without standards in Ohio. It is embarrassing that health education standards are possible in 49 other states, and not in Ohio. Ohio needs these standards because it would give our schools the needed guidance to provide quality health education. The health education I received in school was body based, facts on systems, exercise, and nutrition. If standards were available to our state, health education could include and focus on skills needed to make healthy decisions. We as educators could help students learn how to deal with situations they are faced with and not just inform them of the topic. If we look at the true crisis and need among our young people mental health is screaming out. How do I address mental health effectively when it is not a required topic in the Ohio Revised Code? It could be addressed in a standards-based health education curriculum as the standards taught in mental health would transfer across topics. This is the way the education system as a whole is transforming and without standards health education has fallen behind.

As an educator of a state required course without standards, the impact can be seen in an outdated curriculum and a lack of relevant, health education professional development. In 11 years of teaching I have been to 2 maybe 3 professional development trainings that are solely for health education. The most recent one was for the drug based opioid information. Our curriculum was last updated in 2017. We are currently looking to update our curriculum but it has been significant challenge without guidance or support from the state.

It is urgent the General Assembly “do something” to support the creation of health education standards that will provide the guidance schools and focus attention on building skills-based health education curriculum that supports a healthy Ohio.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Erin Criswell

Miamisburg Health Edu.