

Good afternoon sir,

I'm writing in support of SB 159. My name is Julie Stedman. I am an employee of Heartbeats, a pregnancy resource center serving women and families in Licking, Muskingum and Perry counties. In my role, I work with public and private school students, providing guest teachers and educational resources which satisfy the requirements for health instruction outlined in ORC 3313.60 and 3313.6011. From my vantage point interacting with 7-12th grade teachers and hundreds of their students, the services provided by pregnancy centers like Heartbeats are an investment paying lifelong dividends in our communities.

I propose that the State of Ohio *wants* communities that are equipped with parents making healthy decisions about their sexual activity. It is worthwhile to invest in parents by equipping them with parenting and relationship skills so that their children can thrive. The students I see in our participating classrooms are fully cognizant of the brokenness of their families. They know firsthand the financial and emotional impacts of single-parent households. They feel the impact of relying upon adults who were neither prepared for nor supported in the responsibilities of parenthood. They nod their heads when I ask them if they want to “do it differently”. When they tell me what “differently” means to them, it means

- Being dependable
- Considering the consequences of decisions about sexual activity and dating
- Treasuring their partner
- Preparing to parent
- Protecting their future spouse's health by guarding their own sexual health now
- Relying on the “protection” that comes with careful relationships, rather than just birth control
- Re-thinking “safe sex” to include abstinence and marriage – where the consequences of sexual activity are not dangerous
- Learning about STDs, consent, single-parenting, sexual assault, and how to protect themselves from the risks of sexual activity outside of marriage (which is just what the ORC requires they learn!)

Students and teachers tell me that they appreciate our class time together (funded entirely by donations at no cost to schools). They also appreciate knowing about Heartbeats services, they say their family and friends have visited Heartbeats, and that they will tell their friends about Heartbeats “if they need it”. They acknowledge the usefulness of a place they can visit for free, confidential services like pregnancy tests, parenting classes, healthy relationship classes, and practical resources (diapers, clothes, baby equipment).

Helping to support pregnancy centers by opening doors for tax credits for our donor businesses and individuals is a very wise choice. The best way to protect future generations of Ohioans is to nurture and equip their mothers and fathers! Heartbeats and other pregnancy centers in Ohio are equipping families to thrive by providing essential services. Please do your part to move SB 159 forward.

Thank you,

Julie Stedman

Prevention and Outreach Program, Team Leader
SRAS certified Educator