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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Education

From: James F. Driscoll, Esq., Executive Director

Re: House Bill 275 “An Act relative to parental notification,” and House Bill 295, “An Act relative to parental notification and consent.”

Date: April 14, 2017

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“MCC”) respectfully submits this testimony in support of the shared objectives of House Bill 275 “An Act relative to parental notification,” and House Bill 295, “An Act relative to parental notification and consent.”

The bills differ slightly in language and scope but both versions seek to convert the existing parental “opt-out” provision in the law governing sexuality education of children in the public schools (Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 71, § 32A (2014)) to an “opt-in” standard by mandating that school districts offer sexuality education programs only in “clearly identified non-mandatory elective courses or activities in which parents or guardians may choose to enroll their children through written notification to the school, in a manner reasonably similar to other elective courses or activities offered by the school district.”

Each bill offers conscience protection for teachers.

Parents play crucial and irreplaceable roles in their children’s moral development and particularly in the delicate area of human sexuality. This parental “opt-in” approach would strengthen and reaffirm the parental role of parents as the primary teachers of their children. In addition, teachers who may be uncomfortable in presenting and conducting sexuality lessons based on morally objectionable grounds should be afforded conscience protections.

It is important to note that this change to Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 71, § 32A (2014) would have no effect on those students whose parents desire them to be educated on human sexuality within the classroom environment.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.