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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Education
From: James F. Driscoll, Esq., Executive Director
Re: Senate 259, “An Act Regarding Comprehensive Health Education in Schools,” H 179,
“An Act Relative to Providing Health Education in Schools,” and H 1063, “An Act
Relative to Healthy Youth.”
Date: September 20, 2011

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“Conference”) respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to three bills being heard today before this committee that would mandate that sexual health education be consistent with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework (“Frameworks”) developed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Public Health.

Senate 259, “An Act Regarding Comprehensive Health Education in Schools,” H 179, “An Act Relative to Providing Health Education in Schools,” and House 1063, “An Act Relative to Healthy Youth” direct local public school districts to incorporate the Frameworks in their health education programs. House 179 and House 1063 expressly retain the parental “opt-out” provision codified in M.G.L.c71 §32A. However, Senate 259 does not even include this courtesy for parents in the Commonwealth.

Additionally, House 179 requires a budgetary re-evaluation “to ensure sufficient funding to provide the health education envisioned in the Frameworks” (see Section 7).

The Conference generally supports the inclusion of health education in schools. Many of the topics covered by the Frameworks provide information vital to the physical and mental well-being of children and are non-controversial. However, with respect to the controversial topic of sexuality education, the Conference maintains it is the parents that have the crucial and irreplaceable role in their children’s moral development generally and in particular in the delicate area of human sexuality.

The Conference opposes all three bills based upon the required sexuality education topics contained in portions of the Frameworks which raise serious moral concerns. The Conference defers to Linda Thayer, a member of the Conference’s Subcommittee on Family Life/Pro-Life and Education, and a veteran Boston public schools teacher, who will submit testimony to this Committee detailing the specific moral problems presented by the Frameworks.

Regarding the current “opt-out” provision, the Conference believes that requiring parents to “opt-in” is the better approach as this method strengthens the parents’ role as the primary teacher of their children. See the Conference’s legislative testimony on House 155, House 1060, and House 1934 also being filed today with this Committee.

Additionally, the Conference does not support funding for sexuality education that is contrary to the core values of many tax paying residents.

Based upon the foregoing reasons, the Conference respectfully asks that this Committee report Senate 259, House 179 and House 1063 as “ought not to pass”.

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.