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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Education

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

Re: Senate Bill 202, "An Act providing health education in schools," Senate Bill 209, "An Act relative to healthy youth," House Bill 366 "An Act relative to providing health education in schools," House Bill 388, "An Act relative to comprehensive sexual education and violence prevention programs," House Bill 421 "An Act relative to comprehensive health education in schools," House Bill 450, "An Act relative to healthy youth," and House Bill 522, "An Act regarding an analysis of health education in the Commonwealth."

Date: May 14, 2013

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference ("Conference") respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to seven bills being heard today before this committee that would mandate that 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 Bill 202, House Bill 366 and House Bill 421 direct local school districts to utilize the Frameworks as a guide in the development and selection of curriculum, textbooks, and instructional materials in regards to sexuality and health education. Senate Bill 209 and House Bill 450 mandate that sexuality education be consistent with the Frameworks. Senate Bill 202, House Bill 421 expressly retain the parental "opt-out" provision codified in Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 71, § 32A.

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 inherently noncontroversial. However, with respect to the controversial topic of sexuality education, the Conference maintains it is parents that have the crucial and irreplaceable responsibility and role in their children's moral development generally and in particular in the delicate area of human sexuality.

Regarding the current "opt-out" provision, the Conference believes that requiring parents to "opt-in" is the better approach as this method allows parents to strengthen their role as the primary teacher of their children. See the Conference's legislative testimony on House Bills 333, 431, 440, and 466 also being filed today with this Committee. The opt-in approach also provides parents notification that this topic is being taught to their children. Quite often today parents are unaware of what is being taught in the classroom.

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 aforementioned reasons, the Conference respectfully asks the Committee to report these bills 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.