



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

January 30, 2019

The Honorable Rep. Susan Lontine
Chair, House Health & Insurance Committee
Colorado General Assembly
200 E Colfax Avenue, RM 307
Denver, Colorado 80203

Re: SUPPORT for HB 1032, Testimony from American Atheists in support of the Colorado Youth Wellness Act

Dear Chairperson Lontine and Members of the Health & Insurance Committee:

American Atheists, on behalf of its more than 1,000 constituents in Colorado, thanks you for considering HB 1032, the Colorado Youth Wellness Act. This vital measure that will help ensure that all students in Colorado receive comprehensive sexuality education. Through this bill, students across Colorado have access to medically accurate instruction about their sexual health, and the schools will no longer be able to provide harmful misinformation to students based on religious doctrine or stereotypes about LGBTQ people. We urge you to swiftly pass this important legislation for the sake of Colorado's students.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the "wall of separation" between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheism and atheists are accepted as members of our nation's communities and where casual bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. American Atheists supports medically accurate sex education for young people, free from religious misinformation and coercion.

This critical measure not only protects students from religious coercion by prohibiting human sexuality education programs from explicitly or implicitly endorsing religious tenets and doctrines, it also prevents programs from employing gender stereotypes and excluding information about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Sexual health has a profound impact on both public health and individual well-being, and this bill will help to ensure that all students receive this appropriate education to better make personal decisions about their lives.

Data shows that over 11,000 people in the state of Colorado are living with HIV,¹ and 23% of Colorado high school and middle school students reported being sexually active.² One in ten Colorado students identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and these students report online bullying or harassment at twice the rate of their heterosexual peers. Additionally, more than a quarter of these youth reported being bullied on school property because of their sexual orientation. By implementing instruction about LGBTQ experiences in sexual education curriculum, Colorado schools will be better equipped to establish a standard for cultural competency, respect, and diversity. On the other hand, excluding LGBTQ people from sex education send the message that these students are unwelcome and disordered – a message which helps account for the increased rates of harassment LGBTQ students face.

We strongly support this vital measure, which will protect students from receiving misinformation or being subject to religious coercion as part of their health and sexuality education. The Colorado Youth Wellness Act will help ensure that all Colorado youth receive appropriate and medically accurate information to help them grow and thrive. If you should have any questions regarding American Atheists' support for HB 1032, please contact me at 908.276.7300 x9 or by email at agill@atheists.org.

Sincerely,



Alison Gill, Esq.
Vice President, Legal and Policy
American Atheists

CC: All Members of the House Health & Insurance Committee

¹ AIDSvu, Local Data: Colorado, available at <https://aidsvu.org/state/colorado/>.

² Colorado Dept. of Public Health and Environment, Healthy Kids Colorado Survey and Smart Source Information, available at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/hkcs>.