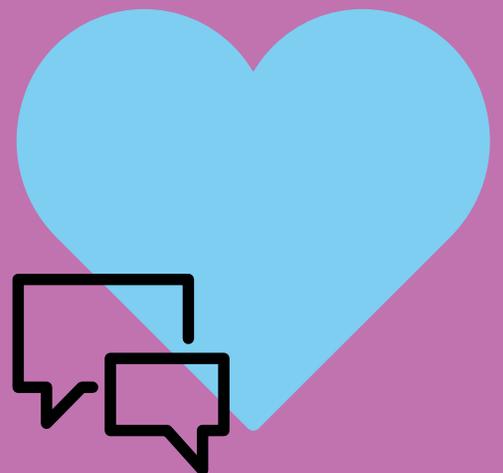


Healthy Youth Act.

Letter to the Editor Toolkit



Questions? Contact advocacy@pplm.org

Letter to the Editor Instructions

FIRST, WHAT IS A LETTER TO THE EDITOR? Newspapers publish short letters from readers to provide a platform for community members to share opinions, discuss current events, and respond to the paper's coverage of issues. Letters to the Editor are important because they can bring attention to something the paper didn't cover, steer or correct the public narrative about something, or show the media, lawmakers, and other decision-makers how community members feel about a topic.

WRITE YOUR LETTER

- Do your research.** Consult the submission guidelines for your local paper and read a few letters to get a sense of what type of letters it publishes and its word count. (Newspapers usually limit letters to the editor to 150 to 300 words.)
- Make it personal.** Are you writing from the perspective of a patient? Do you feel strongly about the #MeToo movement? Why is this issue important to your community?
- Stay on message.** Use clear, simple, attention-getting language and consult the talking points and infographic in this toolkit for wording guidance. Consult bit.ly/HealthyYouthAct for more information.
- Stay focused.** Make 1-2 main points in your argument using short facts and your personal story. Don't get caught up in numbers and lots of statistics.
- Be responsive.** If your letter is in response to an article, include that article's title and date of publication at the top of your letter.
- Sign it!** Sign the letter with your full name and town. People want to know you are part of their community.

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER

- Double check it.** Re-read your letter to catch any typos, ensure all the details are accurate, and that it is not too long.
- Share it with us.** Send a copy to advocacy@pplm.org so we can keep an eye out for it. We're happy to offer edits.
- Send it in!** Some newspapers only accept letters in their online forms, while others have emails listed that you send your letters to.

NEXT STEPS

- Check the paper** (or its website) and let us know if you get published! Daily papers publish letters in about 10 days. Weekly papers may take longer.
- Share your letter** to the editor on Facebook and Twitter. Use #HealthyYouthAct #RespectConsentPrevent hashtags. Tag the paper and your State Rep.
- Didn't get published? That's ok!** An editor still reads it, raising their awareness of the issue, influencing their opinion, and influencing their future coverage. Keep writing!

Talking Points

- Every young person deserves to know how to stay safe and healthy. Comprehensive sex education makes sure young people have vital information to make healthy decisions, develop strong communication skills, and stay focused on their futures.
- Teaching young people how to prevent pregnancy and protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections is critically important to their health and the health of our communities, but that is not enough. Truly comprehensive sex education teaches young people about autonomy, respect, consent, and relationships.
 - *This is important to me because I'm a teacher...*
 - *When I was growing up, I had good sex education and that helped me...*
 - *At my child's school, they had bad sex education, so they didn't know...*
- The *Healthy Youth Act* ensures any Massachusetts public school choosing to teach sex education teaches a curriculum that is medically accurate, inclusive, and truly comprehensive. That means it teaches the benefits of abstinence, about protection methods, and communication skills, including recognizing and asking for consent.
- Right now, there is no way to guarantee a Massachusetts public school is teaching medically accurate, age appropriate sex education. Under the *Healthy Youth Act*, young people will be protected from inaccurate and incomplete information taught in abstinence-only programs. This will help counter what they hear from friends, or what they find on the Internet.
 - *One topic that's most is important to me is _____ because...*
 - *I want my child to know _____ because...*
- The #MeToo movement is a much needed and long overdue wake-up call. We need to do more to educate our young people about consent—why it's important, what it looks like, how to ask for it.
 - Young people need to know how to talk about sex before they start having sex, so they will be better prepared to build healthy relationships, have respectful and mutually consensual experiences, and navigate difficult situations now and throughout their lives.
 - Teaching all people they have a responsibility to listen to and respect others can address the sexual assault epidemic at its roots and change our culture.
- The *Healthy Youth Act* will make sure sex education is taught in an LGBTQ-inclusive way. That means schools will become safer spaces for LGBTQ students overall.
 - It's not enough for schools to tolerate LGTBQ students – all students deserve to feel accepted in their school community; by recognizing LGBTQ people, their health, and relationships in a nonjudgmental way, sex education helps ensure LGBTQ youth have the information they need to stay healthy and feel supported.
 - LGBTQ-inclusive lessons foster a safer school environment overall because they push back against stereotypes and harmful beliefs that can lead to bullying.
- Rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have climbed dramatically over the past decade, and young people bear the brunt of STIs. By expanding access to comprehensive sex education, the *Healthy Youth Act* can help young people understand how to protect themselves and stop this disturbing public health trend in its tracks.
- The Trump Administration has already rescinded \$200M in funding for evidence-based programs that prevent teen pregnancy and wants to invest in ineffective abstinence-only programs. If the federal government is not interested in building a healthier country, then Massachusetts must step up to provide our young people with the education and resources they need.

Building healthy, safe communities begins with our youth.

The **Healthy Youth Act** would give young people in Massachusetts the foundation they need to lead secure, productive lives. The legislation would:

- Ensure districts that offer sex education teach age-appropriate, medically accurate information;
- Require those districts to teach consent, the benefits of delaying sex, how to build healthy relationships, and how to prevent pregnancy and STIs when a person does have sex;
- Require the curricula used be LGBTQ-inclusive
- Continue to allow parents and guardians to take their children out of school-based sex education.

The *Healthy Youth Act*: Why now?

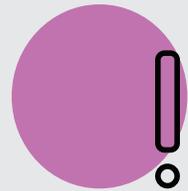
No one should have to say
#MeToo,
especially our young people.



Nine percent of Massachusetts teens reported experiencing non-consensual sexual contact in 2015. We must combat sexual assault at its roots.

STI rates

are on the rise in Massachusetts, and young people are disproportionately affected.

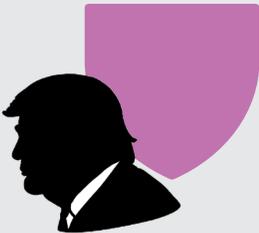


In 2015, 62 percent of chlamydia cases and 41 percent of gonorrhea cases were reported among young people ages 15 to 24. Young people do not have the tools to stay safe and healthy.

The Trump administration is pulling

\$200 million

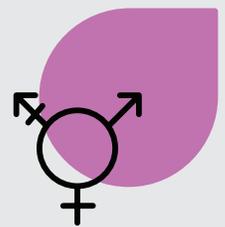
from evidence-based curricula that prevent teen pregnancy. Instead, he is investing in programs proven to be ineffective, like abstinence-only and "fertility awareness" initiatives.



LGBTQ youth

are disproportionately impacted by STIs and sexual assault.

Comprehensive sex education is inclusive of all gender identities and sexual orientations and recognizes LGBTQ youth health needs.



What is the *Healthy Youth Act*?

The *Healthy Youth Act* would ensure every young person who receives sex ed learns how to build healthy lives, relationships, and communities.

Comprehensive sex education teaches medically accurate, age-appropriate information. Unlike its alternatives, comprehensive sex education is actually proven to:

- ✓ Delay the initiation of sex;
- ✓ Reduce the frequency of sex, the number of partners, and unprotected sex;
- ✓ Increase the use of condoms and contraception;
- ✓ Lower STI and unintended pregnancy rates;
- ✓ Reduce bullying for LGBTQ youth;
- ✓ Enhance students' overall ability to learn.

Letter to the Editor Examples

EXAMPLE

The *Healthy Youth Act* ensures that a Massachusetts school that chooses to teach sex education will teach a curriculum that is medically accurate, age-appropriate, and truly comprehensive. That means it teaches the benefits of abstinence, about protection methods, and communication skills, including recognizing and asking for consent.

Too many young people have never heard of consent—why it’s important, what it looks like, how to ask for it. If young people learn about consent early, they will be better prepared to build healthy relationships, have respectful and mutually consensual experiences, and navigate difficult situations once they are in college and throughout our lives.

As a parent, I do my best to educate my children, but I strongly believe that schools should be a resource, as well. The *Healthy Youth Act* would help ensure young people learn to respect others, address the sexual assault epidemic at its roots, and begin to change our culture. I hope Representative *[INSERT YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE]* votes in favor of this commonsense legislation.

John Doe
Haverhill

EXAMPLE

As a young member of the LGBTQ community, I am deeply troubled by the lack of inclusivity in our schools. It’s not enough for our schools to tolerate LGTBQ students – all students deserve to feel accepted in their school community.

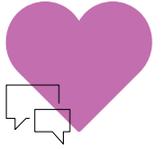
By recognizing LGBTQ people, their health, and relationships in a nonjudgmental way, comprehensive sex education can help ensure LGBTQ youth have the information they need to stay healthy and to feel supported. Moreover, comprehensive sex education has been proven to reduce anti-LGBTQ bullying amongst young people.

That’s why I support the *Healthy Youth Act*. This commonsense legislation will require that sex education is taught in an LGBTQ-inclusive way. That means schools will be safer spaces for LGBTQ students overall, and everyone will have a better understanding of how to take care of their health. I urge Representative *[INSERT YOUR STATE REPRESENTATIVE]* to support the *Healthy Youth Act* and take action to protect LGBTQ youth.

Jesse Doe
Fall River

Healthy Youth Act.

Respect. Consent. Prevent.



Social Media Guidance

Are you following the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund and tagging us in your posts?

-  Facebook.com/PPAdvocacyMA
-  @PPAdvocacyMA
-  @PPAdvocacyMA

Are you using the correct hashtags?

- #HealthyYouthAct
- #RespectConsentPrevent
- Is there an event hashtag? Use it!

Need ideas for what to post? Try some of these:

- Include a call to action! Should your followers fill out an action alert? Sign up to volunteer? Call their reps? Head to bit.ly/HealthyYouthAct for more helpful links.
- Share your story about why LGBTQ-inclusive, consent-focused, and medically accurate sex ed matters to you.
- Go live on Instagram or Facebook to tell your followers why you support the #HealthyYouthAct.
- Look up your state rep on Twitter or Facebook and tag their account in your post.