

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to oppose House Bill 161 Primary and Secondary Education - Comprehensive Health Education Framework. Children do not need to be taught gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality. These are cultural topics – which are highly sensitive for many cultures and should be left to the family to educate their children as they see fit.

I know that everything our teachers do is done with the best intentions and I am so thankful for that. However, intentions are not enough – we must have a results-oriented approach. Unfortunately, the results of breaking down and teaching all these different gender identities and sexual identities are creating more division among children, not less. These categories are not necessary to learn the key lessons about consent, reproductive systems, safe sex and STIs. But much more importantly, these lessons are actually hurting our kids. There is a quote from the "Coddling of the American mind" that says it better than I can -

*"The more you separate people and point out differences among them, the more divided and less trusting they will become. The more you emphasize common goals or interests, share fate, and common humanity, the more they will see one another as fellow human beings, treat one another well, and come to appreciate one another's contributions to the community."*

Inclusion is very important, but it is not achieved by dividing into smaller and smaller categories. Rather, it is achieved by removing categories and labels and appealing to our greater commonality. This testimony is timely with MLK day last week since he championed the approach of overcoming our division by positing our shared humanity as the most important driver of progress. Many religious families are opting out of public school all together because of the pervasiveness of gender ideology and sexual orientation in the curriculum. Opting out of the individual unit isn't enough – as was confirmed on my counties Health Education Advisory committee call this month, the administrators boasted about sneaking in this content to other lessons so that even children whose parents had opted them out would be exposed. By crossing the line into cultural issues, we now have achieved in segregating the culture further.

These lessons are putting undue pressure on young adolescent children to define themselves. Whether intended or not, the teaching of categories will automatically trigger that action. I believe no teenager should be "defining" themselves at this age - sexually or otherwise. The truth is we don't really ever "define" ourselves by what we say or think, it's our actions and how we treat others over time that defines us. Inward focus to define yourself leads to unhappiness, instead we should be encouraging kids to build their confidence and their identities by focusing outward, through their actions over time, accomplishments, and community service.

On the same HEAC call this month, the administrators complained of being understaffed and how they uniquely have to update their curriculum constantly due to law changes as well as changing language around gender ideology and sexuality. I would submit to you any curriculum that is out of date in 2-3 years' time is not one worth teaching our children. We need to get back to basics – while some things have minor changes, the core tenants of health do not. Let's teach our children universal truths – like exercise every day, eat fresh foods over processed, be kind and respectful to everyone, and yes, how the reproductive system works and how to prevent sexual diseases. If we get back to these truths, not only will our children be healthier, happier, but maybe we can meet our children's educational needs without a bigger budget and even higher taxes on the community.

Sincerely,

Sara M Fry