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## **Comprehensive Reforms Proposed to Improve Family Life and Sexuality Education in State Schools Legislators Cite Need to Invest in What Works and What Parents Want**

SAINT PAUL, Minn., Thursday, February 26, 2004— A tri-partisan group of 35 members of the Minnesota House and 10 Senators today introduced the Comprehensive Family Life and Sexuality Education Act. The bill proposes new curriculum standards to update the state's fifteen-year HIV/STD curriculum mandate.

"We want to do what works best to prevent unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV," said Rep. Neva Walker [DFL- Mpls.], the bill's lead author in the House. "Study-after-study shows that when offered comprehensive sexuality education -- all the information they need to be healthy, young people make the choice to delay initiation of sexual activity, and for those who become sexually active, they talk with their partners and use protection. There is no credible research showing that abstinence-only education works."

In 2003, the Minnesota Department of Health released a five-year evaluation of the state-sponsored ENABL program (Education Now and Babies Later) which provides abstinence-only education for teens. The report indicated that surveyed teens showed an increase in sexual activity and a decrease in intent to delay sexual activity. The evaluators recommended replacing the program with a comprehensive sexuality health education curriculum that addressed both abstinence and use of protection.

"We need to have a state law that speaks to what Minnesota's parents expect from their schools," said Sen. Sandy Pappas [DFL - St. Paul]. Pappas is the bill's lead author in the Senate. "Parents expect their schools to be there to help them raise healthy kids, right along with health care providers, faith community leaders and community groups."

Nationally, only 15 percent of parents want their children to have abstinence-only education, according to a recent poll conducted by NPR, the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Nine out of ten Minnesotans supported comprehensive sexuality education for high school students in a 2000 Minnesota poll commissioned by the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP).

This bill replaces the state's existing K-12 HIV/STD curriculum requirement with standards for comprehensive sexuality education that addresses sexual health by teaching about abstinence, values and relationships, and use of protection and contraception to avoid unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. The new standards would only apply to grades seven through twelve. School districts could offer age-appropriate sexuality education in lower grades at their own option. The bill also reestablishes regional training sites to help school districts implement comprehensive sexuality curriculum and services. Funding for the regional training sites was eliminated as part of the state's budget cuts in 2003.

The bill is backed by Sexuality Education for Life-MN, a coalition of educational, religious, health, social service, and advocacy organizations, as well as concerned individuals that promotes lifelong healthy sexuality by advocating for policies on comprehensive sexuality education and access to confidential health care services. Sexuality Education for Life-MN is convened by Minnesota AIDS Project (MAP) and Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP).

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