



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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Testimony of League of Women Voters of Maine

in Opposition to LD 31, An Act to Protect the Safety of Maine Children by Requiring the Express Consent of a Legal Guardian to Dispense Prescription Medication to a Minor

March 22, 2011

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Senator Hastings, Representative Nass and members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary, my name is Anne Schink, and I am a member of the State Board of the League of Women Voters of Maine. The League of Women Voters believes that public policy in a pluralistic society must affirm the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices. That means that no governmental body should make laws restricting access to family planning to citizens when those decisions are rightly made in private with the support of medical service providers. The League supports programs that decrease teen pregnancy. We see no reason to reverse proven success in protecting the privacy of young people to make informed choices about their health care. Maine has a proud history of leadership in the recognition of the need for teens' confidential access to family planning services, including prescription contraception and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, since the creation of the family planning system in 1973. Maine law permits physicians to provide family planning services to any minor "who is a parent or

married or has the consent of his or her legal guardian or who may suffer in the professional judgment of a physician probable health hazards if such services are not provided.” (22 MRSA §1908). This law has been unchanged since it was enacted in 1973.

For over 35 years, Maine law has been hailed as a national model, encouraging parental involvement and guidance but providing the option of accessing reproductive health care confidentially, including prescription contraceptives, ensuring responsible access to vitally important birth control. As a result of this effort, along with Maine’s focus on Family Life Education in our schools and communities, Maine has seen its teen pregnancy rate drop from among the highest in the country to a current ranking of 3rd lowest in the country. We should all be proud of this accomplishment. LD 31 would reverse nearly 40 years of successful law by tying the hands of medical professionals and prohibiting teens from accessing much-needed prescription contraception or prescription drugs to treat sexually transmitted diseases.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is becoming more difficult every day. Every parent hopes that our children will involve us in the hard decisions they encounter in their lives, including decisions surrounding relationships and sexuality. Most teens do involve their parents in their reproductive health care. Those that cannot, and do not, turn to their families, overwhelmingly have compelling reasons for doing so. The research is clear: teens who take advantage of confidential reproductive health care can not be magically forced to talk to their parents by parental consent requirements. Nor will they stop being sexually active. They will just stop getting the health care they need. A sexually active teen who does not

use contraception has a 90% chance of becoming pregnant within one year. This should not be the punishment for being unable to talk to your parents about sex.

The League of Women Voters of Maine opposes LD 31 and asks the committee to do so as well. Please continue Maine's tradition of access to health care. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.