

To: Minnesota House of Representatives Committee on Preventative Health Policy

From: Emma Rachel Pranger, Moorhead MN, House District 4A

My name is Emma Pranger (she/her), a current high school senior from Moorhead and a constituent in MN House District 4A represented by Rep. Heather Keeler. I am writing in support of House File 385.

At my high school, there is one mandatory health course which has a sexual education component in it. Out of an eight-week course, the sex ed unit lasted two days, and stressed abstinence while failing to provide us with adequate information to make responsible choices for our own sexual health. I and many of my classmates left that course with essential questions – Where can I access birth control? Do I need parental consent? What are my reproductive rights? – entirely unanswered.

In our class, our teacher never said the word “consent.” Healthy relationships, dating violence, what defines consensual sex – none of it was covered. I hear boys joke in the hallway about turning no into yes; I have friends who have experienced sexual harassment and assault. I know students who walked into that course believing that the bodily autonomy of their classmates was an obstacle to overcome. My school – and the laws it is operating under – have a responsibility to teach them otherwise. To fail to do so is reckless and puts the lives of other students at risk.

Tenth grade – the same year I took Health – was also the first time I began to seriously question my sexuality. I was afraid of what my friends and family would say; I was afraid that any fluidity in how I define my sexuality would lead to invalidation. Our sex ed unit included no mention of gender or sexuality and was in no way inclusive of the needs of LGBTQ+ students. Lack of access to resources on how to be sexually responsible same-sex relationships has left me and many of my peers navigating blindly. I think that having access to an inclusive curriculum would have helped me greatly. Still, I recognize that I am incredibly fortunate – I have friends and family who accept me as I am, and I have come to embrace my bisexuality. For LGBTQ+ students living with family who refuse to accept them, not having access to these resources is isolating and places them at serious risk.

If implemented, the policy outlined in HF 358 would directly and positively impact the lives of Minnesota students like me. Having access to comprehensive, medically accurate, and culturally responsive sex-education would provide us with the information we need to make responsible choices about our sexual health. Teaching students to respect the bodily autonomy and gender/sexual identities of their peers is essential to protect vulnerable students and to ensure a safe learning environment for all. I urge members of the Preventative Health Policy Committee to consider the lived experiences of Minnesota students - including myself – when voting on this bill.

Respectfully,

Emma R. Pranger.