



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

Every physician matters, each patient counts.

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.656/S.340
AN ACT RELATIVE TO HEALTHY YOUTH
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
September 16, 2025**

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) wishes to be recorded in support of H.656/S.340, *An Act relative to healthy youth*.

The MMS is a professional association of over 23,000 physicians and medical students and advocates on behalf of patients for a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them to provide the best care possible. The MMS supports sexual health education that is comprehensive, medically accurate, culturally sensitive, and age-appropriate. Such education should reduce shame and stigma, while equipping young people with the skills to make safe, informed decisions about their health and relationships. Essential topics should include sexual orientation and gender identity, healthy relationships and communication, reproductive health care, consent and power dynamics, intimate partner violence, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and pregnancy prevention, and effective use of contraceptives.¹ Accordingly, and for the reasons outlined below, we support H.656/S.340, *An Act relative to healthy youth*, which represents an important investment in prevention, health equity, and the well-being of young people across the Commonwealth.

As physicians, we are dedicated not only to treating illness but also to preventing it. Rising STI rates in Massachusetts underscore the urgent need for this legislation. Between 2021 and 2022, cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis all increased, outpacing national trends for chlamydia and gonorrhea.² Especially troubling are the dramatic increases in congenital syphilis and primary and secondary syphilis among people of reproductive potential.³ Evidence and clinical experience show us

¹ Massachusetts Medical Society Policy Compendium. [https://www.massmed.org/Governance-and-Leadership/Policies.-Procedures-and-Bylaws/MMS-Policy-Compendium-\(pdf\)](https://www.massmed.org/Governance-and-Leadership/Policies.-Procedures-and-Bylaws/MMS-Policy-Compendium-(pdf))

² Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Public Health. (n.d.). *SHIP – Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)*. Mass.gov. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ship-sexually-transmitted-infections-stis>

³ Ibid.

that access to age-appropriate, medically accurate, and comprehensive sexual health education is a critical tool for disease prevention and health promotion. This legislation will ensure that students across the Commonwealth have access to an education that prepares them to make informed, positive, and safe decisions throughout their lives.

A strong evidence-base supports the public health rationale for this legislation. Studies consistently demonstrate that comprehensive sexual health education delays initiation of sexual activity, reduces rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and decreases unintended pregnancies.⁴ It also fosters healthier relationships by teaching consent, communication, and respect.⁵ Importantly, the bill requires instruction to be medically accurate, inclusive, and aligned with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Curriculum Framework, which is regularly reviewed to reflect current science. In a time when misinformation proliferates online, schools have an especially important role in ensuring that young people receive trustworthy guidance and resources on sexual and reproductive health.

Equally critical is the bill's emphasis on inclusivity. Our patients represent the full spectrum of gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Too often, young people, and particularly LGBTQ+ students, report feeling unseen or stigmatized in traditional health education. This legislation ensures that curricula affirm the dignity of all students and provide accurate information and resources tailored to their needs. As physicians, we recognize that inclusion is not optional; it is a cornerstone of effective public health practices and essential to reducing disparities in health outcomes.

From a systems perspective, the requirement for biennial reporting to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education brings much-needed accountability and transparency. This data will allow policymakers, educators, and health professionals to assess the reach and quality of sexual health education across districts and to identify where gaps remain. Just as in clinical practice, data is essential to continuous quality improvement.

Our experience as physicians caring for adolescents and young adults has shown us firsthand what is at stake. We see the consequences when young people lack access to accurate information: higher rates of STIs, unintended pregnancies, unsafe relationships, and preventable trauma.⁶ Conversely, when students are equipped with knowledge, they are more likely to delay sexual activity, use

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health & Committee on Adolescence. (2016). *Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents*. Pediatrics, 138(2), e20161348. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-1348>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

contraception consistently, communicate openly with partners, and seek health care when needed.⁷ This legislation will empower Massachusetts students with the tools they need to navigate their health and relationships with confidence and safety.

For these reasons, the MMS respectfully urges favorable action on H.656/S.340. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

⁷ Ibid.