

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 1, 2023

3:32 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Löki Tobin, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Jesse Bjorkman
Senator Jesse Kiehl
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present.

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 43

"An Act relating to health and personal safety education; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 43

SHORT TITLE: HEALTH AND PERSONAL SAFETY EDUCATION

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) GRAY-JACKSON

01/18/23	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/23	(S)	EDC, HSS
03/01/23	(S)	EDC AT 3:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

BESSE ODOM, Staff
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided the sectional analysis for SB 43.

DR. ROBIN HOLMES, representing self
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 43.

NICOLE MORENTSON, Education Manager
Planned Parenthood Great Northwest
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 43.

TARALYNN CHESLEY, Teen Council Member
Planned Parenthood Great Northwest
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a presentation on Health and Personal Safety.

TAYLOR STEWART, Teen Council Member
Planned Parenthood Great Northwest
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented a presentation on Health and Personal Safety.

KELLY MANNING, Deputy Director
Division of Innovation and Education Excellence
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Provided an overview of the fiscal note for SB 43.

PATRICK MARTIN, Development Director
Alaska Right to Life
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

APRIL SMITH, representing self
North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

VALORRAINE DATTAN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of 43.

ERICA GRIFFITH, representing self
Eagle River, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to 43.

KANEEKA AUSTIN, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

XAVIER REYNOLDS, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

NICOLE DAVIS, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

JAMIE GIBSON, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

KC CASORT, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

ERIN MOROTTI, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

JULIE SMYTH, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

JAY MCDONALD, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

TAMARA KRUSE ROSELIUS, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

BUZZ KELLEY, representing self

Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

JENNIE STEWART, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

DANA WASSMANN, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

REILY DIXSON, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

MARC PENNO, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

GALE PENNO, representing self
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

IRENE BORTNICK, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

JULIE WHATMOUGH, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 43.

THERESA GROVES, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 43.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:32:37 PM](#)

CHAIR LÖKI TOBIN called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Stevens, Kiehl, Bjorkman, and Chair Tobin.

SB 43-HEALTH AND PERSONAL SAFETY EDUCATION

[3:33:27 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 43 "An Act relating to health and personal safety education; and providing for an effective date."

CHAIR TOBIN said the committee received a large form document from Alaska Right to Life opposing SB 43. It is available on BASIS. Alaska Statute 14.03.016 allows a parent to withdraw a child from any curricula contained within SB 43.

[3:35:15 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON, District G, sponsor of SB 43, work order 33-LS0299\A, provided the following statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Sex education is essential to young people's health, relationships, and life goals. Young people should get age-appropriate, medically accurate information. Young people across Alaska deserve age-appropriate, medically accurate information about sex, reproduction, and healthy relationships taught in culturally competent, inclusive ways. Sex education should cover a wide range of topics, including healthy and unhealthy relationships, decision-making and peer pressure, abstinence, communication, consent, body image, media literacy and critical thinking, birth control, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). But many students in Alaska don't have access to the information and skills they need to protect their health because our state does not have comprehensive requirements for sex education in public schools. Sex education can equip young people with the skills they need for a lifetime of good health, including the ability to have healthy relationships, make decisions for themselves, think critically about the world, be a good ally to those who are different, and love yourself for who you are. Comprehensive, medically accurate sexual health education is the best way to help young people stay healthy. Senate Bill 43 allows schools to teach medically and age-appropriate curricula regarding personal and sexual health.

[3:37:16 PM](#)

BESSE ODOM, Staff, Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 43 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Section 1: This section amends AS 14.03.120, the Statute regarding public school reports on school performance and planning by adding a new subsection. This new subsection requires a summary and evaluation of health and personal safety.

Section 2: This section amends AS 14.16.050 by adding personal safety program standards.

Section 3: This section amends AS 14.30.360, by adding conforming language as seen in section 2. This section is also amended to mandate a health and personal safety education curriculum. Additionally, this

section adds a new subsection. This new subsection requires medically and scientifically accurate information for curriculum and defines "voluntary consent."

Section 4: Adds a new subsection that sets requirements for the health and personal safety education program curriculum.

Section 5: Repeals AS 14.30.361.

Section 6: This section sets an effective date of June 30, 2024.

[3:39:00 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN announced invited testimony on SB 43.

[3:40:01 PM](#)

DR. ROBIN HOLMES, representing self, Homer, Alaska, testified by invitation in support of SB 43. She clarified that she is not speaking on behalf of Kachemak Bay Family Planning Clinic. She said she is a family physician licensed in Alaska and practices primarily in Homer. She has dedicated her career to the improvement of the lives of Alaskans from infancy to adulthood. She supports SB 43 as it aligns with the administration's goals to prioritize the health of families and children. Medical organizations state that sexual health education should be medically accurate, evidence-based, and age-appropriate. She said that as a provider who educates young people and their families about sexual and reproductive health, she knows the importance of using respectful and non-judgmental language. She said using respectful language allows her to care for her patients and work towards a healthier community. She stated her belief that SB 43 would allow all Alaskans to feel respected.

MS. HOLMES said sex education is essential for young people to thrive. They understand the importance of safety, consent, and respect through education, but they also begin to understand their own bodily autonomy and personal agency. Young people can make informed, thoughtful decisions when given the tools. SB 43 would require Alaska's sex education curriculum to include the following and more: instruction on human development, sexuality, reproduction, contraception, pregnancy, prevention, and sexually transmitted infections. She stated she addresses these issues in her office daily, and frequently it is a youth's first introduction to the topics. Doctor offices can be intimidating to kids, and most do not visit a doctor often.

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MS. HOLMES said teaching about sexual health should not differ from discussing general health. Stigmatizing sexual education fails young people. Sex education in schools is an opportunity to improve public health in Alaska, which has an epidemic of babies born with syphilis, leads the nation in chlamydia rates, and is behind the rest of the country in Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinations and Papanicolaou (Pap) tests. She stated she should not be the first person to tell people in their 20s that there was a vaccination they could have gotten to prevent having cervical cancer. Institutions within Alaska have the power to ensure young people know about critical sexual health tools such as vaccines. The same institutions can help Alaskans learn about sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention, identification, and treatment. Twenty percent of new human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) cases are in people aged 13 - 24. She had to tell a young person they were HIV positive, even though three federally approved medications exist to prevent it. Educating youth can help end the global pandemic that has been fought for two generations. Comprehensive sex education can also play a role in reducing unplanned pregnancies among people of all ages. Young people deserve to have information about contraception and information about the challenges of parenting.

MS. HOLMES said some youth turn to trusted adults for information. However, adults do not always know the critical information a youth needs. Also, many children do not have a trusted adult with whom they can talk. She stated that comprehensive sex education in public schools must be a standard expectation for youth to thrive. SB 43 allows Alaskan youth to step into the world as healthy adults.

[3:45:37 PM](#)

NICOLE MORENTSON, Education Manager, Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Juneau, Alaska, provided a brief work history and gave the following testimony on SB 43:

[Original punctuation provided.]

In order to see improvement in health outcomes for Alaskan youth, we must increase health awareness and access to sexual health education in schools. Through education and promotion, our collective goal is to improve health outcomes for our Alaskan youth so that we see improvement in the statistics that were referred to by prior testimony. What we know in the

public health and education field is that our youth need opportunities to access medically accurate and age-appropriate information about their bodies and relationships in order to make informed choices about their health. Comprehensive sexual health education does just that. By providing developmentally appropriate standards for sexual health education in K-12 grade levels, we can ensure that what is being taught is consistent across our state and that youth have less need to seek out information about sex from unreliable or unsafe resources like the internet, exploitative situations and misguided peers.

The overwhelming majority of people in Alaska wasn't young people to have access to sexual health education - in a 2019 survey, over 90 percent of Alaskan voters agreed that sexual health education should be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and should cover healthy relationships, consent, and communication skills, all core aspects of SB 43. Sex education is widely supported by medical associations and public health experts, like the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Alaska Association of Student Governments. In fact, Alaska Public Health Association recently passed resolutions in support of legislation like SB 43, and the state of Alaska already recommends sexual health education standards in the Alaska Skills for a Health Life. The majority of people support sexual health education, including more the 90 percent of parents.

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MS. MORTENSON continued her testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB 43 specifically addresses the concern that there is no standardization for how sexual health is taught in Alaskan schools. The combination of most teacher preparation programs not providing guidance for sexual health topics in schools and our state not offering clear guidelines on what is medically accurate, free of values, and age appropriate, leaves it up to interpretation of each individual teacher to decide what is taught to our youth. We standardize learning goals for all other topics in schools like math, science, reading and English- we should have the same

standards and guidelines for sexual health education. Creating standards prevents dissemination of inaccurate information or misguided values. Comprehensive sex education is essential to young people's health, relationships, and life goals. Current research shows that when youth have access to comprehensive sexual health education that includes information on abstinence, methods to prevent unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease prevention and healthy relationships teens wait longer to have sex and are less likely to experience an unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease. Comprehensive sexual health education also covers life skills topics like decision making, resisting peer pressure, communication, consent, media literacy and critical thinking. We know that sex education should be culturally specific, taught each school year by a trained educator, so that youth of all backgrounds and abilities have the skills they need to lead a healthy life.

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MS. MORTENSON continued her testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

This bill could require that this life changing information be taught to youth across our state, while still allowing for flexibility in how the information is taught and what curriculum is used to meet the required standards. We know that school districts and communities can ensure the content is culturally specific and relevant to each of their communities, while understanding that just like any other content area, standards guide the information being taught. This bill requires that the guidelines are consistent with the National Sexuality Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12, which outlines age-appropriate learning standards. This bill will also still allow parents to opt their children out of sexual health education at school if they prefer to provide education at home.

It is true that this bill covers grades K-12, and the topics will build upon each other each year. SB 157 requires that all health education be age appropriate - that means providing information to guide youth as

they grow in their human development. For example, referencing the National Sexuality Education standards, the guidelines require that starting in kindergarten through 2nd grade, students will learn how to identify family structures; describe characteristics of a friend; why bullying and teasing are wrong, and most importantly explains that all people, including children, have the right to tell others not to touch their body when they do not want to be touched and who to go to if this happens. Next, in 3rd - 5th grade these topics are expanded and start to prepare them for what to experience as they reach puberty and continues to discuss topics around friendship communication. An example of what would be taught in 6th-8th grade is describing the advantages and disadvantages of communicating using technology and social media. These standards will ensure students are equipped with accurate information to deal with what is happening at their developmental stage.

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MS. MORTENSON continued her testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

In my experience teaching sexual health education in the classroom, it is critical that students receive medically accurate information without judgment or shame. One of the ways we work towards that is by providing a space for students to ask anonymous questions. Most of these questions come from information they may have seen or heard about online or from friends - they are really trying to understand if their bodies and their experiences are normal. Here are some questions I have received that reflect the failure of our current system to inform our students about common myths and misconceptions about sexual health. For example:

"Can mountain dew prevent pregnancy?" "How do I break up with an abusive partner safely?" "Is my body normal?" "What do I do if my partner doesn't want to use condoms?" or shock from the class when I share that the most common symptom of an STI is no symptom at all because of preconceived notions that they will be able to visibly tell if they have one.

With this bill in place, we can ensure these questions are answered in a medically accurate, evidence-based, age-appropriate way for all youth across our state. Considerable research, including from the CDC shows that comprehensive sex ed reduces sexual risk behaviors and STIs. It is also associated with delayed initiation of sex, fewer sexual partners, and more widespread use of condoms and contraceptives.

[3:55:17 PM](#)

MS. MORTENSON continued her testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

We also need sex ed to be inclusive, which means ensuring that curriculum resonates with all students, regardless of gender, gender identity, race, disability status, religion, or sexual orientation. Our educators have shared multiple instances where a student has approached them after a lesson to share how much it meant for them to see themselves in the curriculum. We know creating spaces where all students feel welcomed, valued, and represented can increase student attendance, grades, and lower suicidality and prevent child abuse. Comprehensive sex ed also teaches people to be a good ally to those who are different.

We need to support the need for youth to have information about their bodies and relationships normalized to support the social and emotional changes that they go through, provide medically accurate answers to their questions, ensure they have the knowledge to seek the necessary health care for them, and empower youth to have power and agency over their lives and bodies. I request that each of you support this legislation to ensure our young people have the skills and knowledge they need to lead healthier lives.

[3:56:47 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN acknowledged Senator Kiehl arrived.

[3:57:16 PM](#)

TAYLOR STEWART, Teen Council Member, Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Anchorage, Alaska, introduced herself and co-presented Health and Personal Safety SB 43.

[3:57:29 PM](#)

TARALYNN CHESLEY, Teen Council Member, Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Anchorage, Alaska, introduced herself and co-presented Health and Personal Safety SB 43.

[3:57:36 PM](#)

MS. STEWART said she is a junior in high school, and it is her second year in Teen Council. Comprehensive sex education is a major tool that needs implementing for the future of Alaska regarding protection against abuse, violence, unhealthy relationships, unplanned pregnancies, and infectious diseases.

[3:58:14 PM](#)

MS. STEWART turned to slide 2, Overview, and said the presentation would address the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

1. Teen Council - Who we are
2. Major Alaska Issues
 - a. Consent and Safe Relationships
 - i. Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Rates in Youth
 - b. STI rates amongst teenagers
3. Effects of Comprehensive Sexual Education
 - a. Comprehensive sex-ed in Washington
4. Our stories

[3:58:42 PM](#)

MS. STEWART turned to slide 3, Teen Council, and spoke to the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Anchorage
- 15 members
- Extensive Training
- Formal and Informal Education
- Peer Led Sex Ed

[3:59:50 PM](#)

MS. CHESLEY moved to slide 4, Consent and Safe Relationships, and spoke to the following:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Alaska has the highest rate of sexual assault and rape in the nation.
- Sexual assault of a minor in Alaska is six times the national average. The median age is 9 years old.
- Alaska does not require sex education.
- Alaska does not require sex ed to teach about consent, or for any sex ed to be medically accurate.
- 13.7 percent of people in Alaska have experienced some form of sexual abuse, estimated to be the highest in the country

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MS. STEWART advanced to slides 5 - 7, STI Rates in Alaska, she stated the slides contain information graphics that support the following points:

[Original punctuation provided.]

- Alaska consistently has one of the worst rates for STIs in the country
- Alaska is suffering from climbing gonorrhea rates moving to the second highest in the country
 - Alaska reported a rate of 303.7 cases per 100,000 people in 2018
- Alaska has had the highest rate of chlamydia in the country since 2001
 - In the 2018 CDC STI survey Alaska reported a rate of 832.5 cases per 100,000 people
- Alaska also had an increase in syphilis spread reporting a 24 percent increase over the 2020 total last year

- Some of these cases were congenital meaning they were in babies born to infected mothers
- This is especially dangerous because this can be fatal in infants
- 89 percent of these cases occur in urban residents
- Alaska Public Media: one major contributor to this is the low median age in Alaska
 - "Rates of sexually transmitted infections 'tend to be higher among teens and young adults,'" - Clinton Bennett, Alaska Department of Health spokesperson

[4:02:51 PM](#)

MS. CHESLEY moved to slide 8 and spoke to the effects of comprehensive sex education:

[Original punctuation provided.]

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- Reduces rates of sexual risk behaviors and STIs in teenagers
- Associated with delayed initiation of sex, fewer sexual partners, and more widespread use of condoms and contraceptives
- Helps teach healthy relationships and good communication skills before young people become sexually active

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MS. STEWART said she has seen the impact of sex education and its vital role in enabling people to advocate for and protect themselves even though she has only been a member for two years. She relayed two personal conversations with students that illustrate the importance of sex education and its vital role in enabling people to advocate and protect themselves. The first story demonstrated the importance of effective birth control and accurate information. The second conversation was with a sexually active adult who did not know the most common symptoms of STIs and where to receive testing. She stated she supports SB 43 because it would educate people about sex.

[4:08:13 PM](#)

MS. CHESLEY said she is a junior at Stellar Secondary School in Anchorage but is originally from Bristol Bay. It is her second year on Teen Council. She stated that as a student, her education on sex consisted of one day in fifth grade and Brea's Law in High school. Other than this, most of what she has learned has been from jokes, media, and random internet searches. She said she would have benefitted from having a sex education teacher or mentor starting in middle school when students began talking more about sex and showing affection. She became a member of Teen Council out of a desire to know more about abstinence, birth control, consent, communication, anatomy, safe sex, safe relationships, and more. She said that as an LGBT Alaskan Native, she had never found a space where she felt entirely comfortable. Joining the Teen Council has made her feel empowered within her own body. She can converse comfortably with her healthcare provider because of what she has learned at Teen Council. Accessibility to accurate sex education information is limited in villages because resources are minimal. Everyone deserves access to medically accurate information. Alaskan Native women and youth have the highest domestic violence rates in the US. She said a teen mom told her that access to sex education and condoms was unavailable in her village. Sex education is fundamental for everyone because everyone should have access to information that helps them make informed decisions. She stated that while sharing information with others through Teen Council is empowering, not everyone knows about the organization. Schools should teach sex education. She opined that today's youth are the next generation, and if the legislature passes SB 43, it will heal a generational wound.

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SENATOR STEVENS thanked the presenters for their bravery in sharing their thoughts with the committee.

[4:14:15 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN agreed and asked Ms. Manning to discuss the fiscal notes for SB 43.

[4:14:39 PM](#)

KELLY MANNING, Deputy Director, Division of Innovation and Education Excellence, Department of Education and Early Child Development (DEED) Juneau, Alaska, said the department provided a fiscal note that breaks down the costs of updating its standards to align with SB 43:

[Original punctuation provided.]

(1) \$30.0 for \$1.5 stipends for 20 parents and qualified stakeholders for their year long participation in the research and authoring of the standards, 2) \$35.0 contract for a national Personal Safety Health Education expert to facilitate the standards process and professional development materials, and 3) \$6.0 for legal fees to implement the necessary regulation changes.

DEED plans to hold the necessary stakeholder engagement meetings with participating stakeholders virtually and to publish and disseminate the new health education/sexual health standards electronically.

Transition language provides the State Board of Education and Early Development two years to develop health and personal safety guidelines. A multi-year appropriation of \$71.0 covering FY2024 and FY2025 would allow the department to expend funding over the two years.

[4:17:13 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN opened public testimony on SB 43.

[4:18:20 PM](#)

PATRICK MARTIN, Development Director, Alaska Right to Life, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 and saying the petitions submitted to the committee were not form letters. The letters differ significantly, and Alaskans' deeply held beliefs and convictions should not be disparaged. Another concern is that SB 43 repeals AS 12.30.361. A key component of the statute is that school boards approve all curriculum, literature, and materials related to sex education, human reproduction education, and human sexuality and that it is available for parental review. SB 43 retains a parent's right to opt their children out of the curriculum but removes their seat at the table. He referenced the National Sex Education Standards (NSES), Core Content Skills K - 12 curriculum that SB 43 would require and questioned how age-appropriate and scientifically accurate standards are determined. He opined that SB 43 has a distinct bias against children in the womb. He encouraged all senators on the education committee to vote no on SB 43.

[4:21:26 PM](#)

APRIL SMITH, representing self, North Pole, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 and saying she agrees that Alaskan students deserve quality sex education. The state sets standards in many areas of education that are non-controversial. The introduction of SB 43 mentioned that it would allow districts to provide sex education to students. However, school districts are already allowed to teach sex education. SB 43 would specify what districts must teach. She opined that parents and guardians fill the roles Senator Jackson mentioned, not the government. The values in SB 43 are not neutral. The definition of family is a moral value. SB 43 would put forward the government's non-neutral definition of family, casual sex at any age, contraception, abortion, LGBT sexuality, and sex as a human right. Medical facts presented in the NSES can be refuted with alternate medical peer-reviewed published studies. Abortion and contraception facts are highly debated. "Misled adults" is a code phrase for families teaching values contrary to government values and "challenges of parenting" as code for abortion. She stated her desire that local control be respected and leave the statute as it stands.

[4:24:09 PM](#)

VALORRAINE DATTAN, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of 43 because Alaska has unacceptably high rates of sexual assault, STIs, and unintended pregnancies, especially among younger people. Providing young people with age-appropriate information is vital to keep them safe. It is in people's best interest for educators to teach formal standardized education in all grade levels. SB 43 does not remove a parent's right to opt their children out of sex education classes.

[4:25:33 PM](#)

ERICA GRIFFITH, representing self, Eagle River, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 saying she had been a military and civilian nurse in Alaska for six years. People are claiming that SB 43 will teach health education that is culturally appropriate and medically accurate. However, what is medically accurate is no longer considered culturally appropriate, specifically regarding apparent biological and immutable differences between men and women. Suggesting a national standardized curriculum could achieve both is a farce. People entrust schools with educating children. Parents are charged with safeguarding their children and raising them in a manner congruent with their beliefs. AS 14.30.361 ensures that school boards have the right to approve sex education materials, and parents have the right to review the materials. AS 14.30.361

requires specific licensing and accreditation standards. She said if the purpose of SB 43 is to ensure children learn medically accurate and comprehensive information, the repeal of AS 14.30.361 should not be required or desired. She opined that it is not the role of the education system to use schools as a platform to promote an advanced, politically charged, and morally questionable ideology in the minds of young citizens. She stated that her concern is to maintain cultural appropriateness and that the social constructs of abortion and gender are not endorsed.

[4:27:34 PM](#)

KANEEKA AUSTIN, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 and saying schools can already teach sex education. Although sex education is important, she disagrees with sex education for kindergarteners.

[4:28:32 PM](#)

XAVIER REYNOLDS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 and saying he identifies as a black male from Georgia, where schools taught sex education. Teaching sex education made people more curious about sex, resulting in more babies and STIs. Teaching sex education in K - 5 grades is disgusting and should not happen. Sex education is very important when it is age-appropriate, starting in 8th grade. He said he would be an angry parent if SB 43 passes.

[4:29:54 PM](#)

NICOLE DAVIS, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 and said she knows some of the people who influenced the meeting. She stated it is concerning that SB 43 was reviewed quickly, not all the information about it was presented, and the hearing was held at a time difficult for parents to attend. She said the state is attempting to take the place of parents. It is not the school's responsibility, and it hurts children. SB 43 will also hurt school districts because parents will remove their children from public education if SB 43 passes. She fears women will not learn the emotional consequences of abortion. It would be medically and scientifically accurate to teach people that only two biological sexes exist. However, it will not be taught based on what has been presented. Changing sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) sounds less scary and harsh. She opined that society risks increasing child grooming, sexual abuse, and assault when educators play the role of parents. She urged a no vote on SB 43.

[4:32:40 PM](#)

JAMIE GIBSON, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 and said that when she attended Lathrop High School, she did not receive a useful, medically accurate sex education. Abstinence was encouraged, birth control was not easily accessible, and students became pregnant due to a lack of knowledge. More than 46 percent of sexually active students reported not using a condom the last time they had sex. Alaska has high rates of STIs. It is second in the nation for gonorrhea and third for chlamydia and syphilis. Alaska also has the highest report of rape, yet it does not require instruction on sex education or consent. Children are the future, so teach them age-appropriate, medically accurate information about sex education.

[4:34:11 PM](#)

KC CASORT, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43. She said she graduated from West Valley High School and the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She stated that she and ninety percent of Alaskans believe sex education should be medically accurate and age-appropriate. It should cover relationships, consent, and communication skills. Her family and school did not discuss sex education. She stated her belief that had she received sex education, her first partnership would have been healthier, and she would not be dealing with its repercussions. Alaska's rate of child sexual assault is six times the national average. All young Alaskans deserve the tools to be safe and healthy. She urged the passage of SB 43.

[4:36:14 PM](#)

ERIN MOROTTI, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 saying that according to a recent Alaska youth behavior survey, 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 6 boys would be victims of child sexual abuse by 18. In 2015, the Office of Children's Service investigated 1,272 reports of child sexual abuse by immediate or extended family members. One in 10 high school students reported being physically or sexually abused by their daily partner. According to the National Association of School Nurses, there is a link between academic achievement and student health. Sex education helps:

- Prevent dating violence and bullying.
- Develop healthier relationships.
- Delays sexual initiation.
- Reduce unplanned pregnancies.
- Reduce HIV and other STIs.

- Reduce sexual health disparities among LGBTQ youth.
- Correct media, peer, and parental misinformation.

MS. MOROTTI stated she wholeheartedly supports SB 43 for these reasons. She is grateful sex education is offered in her school district and would love to see it provided across the state. She opined that SB 43 does not reduce parental rights. The fiscal note states that 20 parents and qualified stakeholders will participate in a year-long group that will research and author the standards if SB 43 passes.

[4:38:33 PM](#)

JULIE SMYTH, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 because of her sex education experience in Fairbanks, where she was born and raised. She stated that it is the community's responsibility to prepare students for the real world. It cannot be assumed that parents or foster parents are educated enough to impart the information. She described the limited sex education information she received at public and private church schools. After graduating, she married. She did not realize the relationship was abusive because her husband did not hit her. She did not understand why she got urinary tract infections when she had sex, or that forced sex was wrong and illegal. She learned after her divorce that she had contracted an STI from her unfaithful husband. She stated she also had no preparation for sex with other genders as someone who was bisexual. She is not the only LGBT+ person to grow up in Alaska.

[4:41:19 PM](#)

JAY MCDONALD, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 saying it has specifically vague language about personal safety and sexual health and wished it used accurate words to describe the learning objectives. He opined that it does not use clear language because less than 10 percent of Alaskans want government schools to tell kindergarteners that sex is an infinite spectrum. Alaskan parents do not want the government encouraging young children to be gender creative at school, adopt made-up neo pronouns, or change their name or gender. Alaskan parents do not want government schools coaching children on how to keep sexual secrets from parents. Some teachers wish they could focus on reading, writing, and math without being forced to indoctrinate kids into radical left-wing social theory. Alaska's students already rank 48th, 49th, and 50th in standardized testing. He stipulated that SB 43 will further reduce student performance due to time lost teaching other subjects. He stated his belief that government schools have been violating state statutes requiring parental

notification and consent. He opined that SB 43 would damage the bond between children and parents. SB 43 should be withdrawn.

[4:42:51 PM](#)

TAMARA KRUSE ROSELIUS, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 because Alaska has no requirement to teach age-appropriate medically accurate sex education classes. Alaska has high rates of STIs, increasing rates of HIV, and too many teen pregnancies. Alaska also has the highest rate of recorded rape in the US. She said ignoring these statistics borders on negligence to students. Students need more access to accurate information in schools. Learning from a trusted individual is better than from dubious online information. Over 90 percent of Alaskan voters agree that sex education should be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and include healthy relationships, consent, and communication skills. She asked the committee to support young Alaskans by voting yes on SB 43.

[4:44:23 PM](#)

BUZZ KELLEY, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 for two reasons. First, the material is not subject to parental review. Second, homosexuality, gender confusion, and abortion are issues that schools should not teach. Education in school should focus on reading, writing, and math.

[4:45:18 PM](#)

JENNIE STEWART, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43. SB 43 is a safety issue, not an opinion issue. Her job as a parent is to keep her daughter safe and equip her with the tools necessary to protect herself. Sex education discusses topics where a lack of education can lead to cancer, HIV, sexual assault, and unwanted pregnancies. She stated she is not a medically trained individual who can provide accurate scientific information on every issue. Statute frequently allows parents to control their child's education by opting out of a class. She opined that she should have the same parental right to inform her child by opting in. She reasoned that schools do not outsource other science-based education subjects to parents who are uneducated in science. Failing to pass SB 43 forces her to be an unqualified sex education teacher.

[4:46:52 PM](#)

DANA WASSMANN, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 because alarming statistics show Alaska needs medically accurate sex education in public schools. She

stated she is a mother and foster parent who teaches her children the importance of boundaries, bodily autonomy, and safety by reading them age-appropriate books. She teaches them to inform a trusted grown-up if they feel unsafe. Last year while reading a book, a foster child disclosed abuse that had gone unreported. She said it was heartbreaking to hear a young child learn for the first time that what happened was wrong. She wondered how many children in Alaska's public schools experience abuse but do not realize there are safe adults they can approach for help. She also said a newborn baby was abandoned in a cardboard box at a mailbox in Fairbanks on December 31, 2021, with a handwritten note left by the baby's teenage mother asking someone to care for the baby. She said she wondered what education the teenage mother received regarding sex, safe surrender, and safety at home. She asked the committee to vote yes on SB 43.

[4:48:58 PM](#)

REILY DIXSON, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 and said she graduated from West Valley High School and now attends college. She said she knows too many people affected by the lack of proper sex education. Alaska has high rates of STIs and sexual assault. It has the highest rate of reported rape in the US. Passing SB 43 will educate Alaska's youth and support young people. She said that as a queer Alaskan Native who has survived rape, she urges the passage of SB 43.

[4:50:01 PM](#)

MARC PENNO, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 because it takes away the rights of parents to review school curriculums. He further questions what age-appropriate sex education means for kindergarteners. He opined that overexposure to sexuality and sexual gratification are responsible for many of the problems teenagers face. He opined that sex starts too early and SB 43 increases the exposure. SB 43 indoctrinates children regarding abortion, family, parental roles, gender modification, hormone blockers, and surgery. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) advocates abortion marketing in schools, discriminates against expressing biological sex in sports, and opposes life beginning at conception. He opined that if people returned to morals, values, and God, society would have less confusion and disparity. He said he stands in total opposition to SB 43.

[4:51:54 PM](#)

GALE PENNO, representing self, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 saying many children today suffer from

psychosocial and antisocial disorders that parents, professionals, and ministries can best address. The sex education proposed in SB 43 is not the solution and would likely cause more problems and confusion to children. She opined that some of what SB 43 proposes equates to child abuse.

[4:52:35 PM](#)

IRENE BORTNICK, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 saying she is a retired schoolteacher and the mother of four Anchorage School District graduates. She opined that kindergarten is not too young to be taught sex education. She said she taught children about abuse, safety, and empowerment. She did not teach children about sexual intercourse, but she did teach children about touching and what to do if they felt unsafe. All children need these skills; they do not always get them from home. School districts should add more age-appropriate information to the curriculum as children age. She asked the legislature to pass SB 43 so that every child in Alaska receives the same information and skills to keep them informed, healthy, and safe.

[4:54:01 PM](#)

JULIE WHATMOUGH, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 43 saying she is an energy health practitioner who frequently talks to people about mind, body, and spiritual healing along with sexual health, understanding, and trauma. She said that when she was in basic training, people had inaccurate health information because schools did not offer sex education. She supports boys and girls learning about each other's reproductive systems. She opined that teaching consent should be mandatory to preserve the safety of children, especially younger children. Teaching about STIs will reduce stigma, provide proper education, and encourage people to seek treatment.

[4:56:39 PM](#)

THERESA GROVES, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 43 saying that it is flawed. She opined that too many people provide emotional stories of personal history, marital dysfunction, and religious experiences that are not a school's responsibility. The family unit and other age-appropriate venues should be the resources used for sex education. SB 42 is problematic because it requires teaching national content standards, which undermines local control. Every community has different tolerances for controversial issues. SB 43 would demand that all communities indoctrinate students with unsettled controversial ideas and standards. She stated her belief that the current statute adequately encourages

districts to teach sex education and dating safety. However, opt-out should be changed to opt-in. The legislature continually adds more responsibility to teachers and wonders why student test scores are falling and people are dissatisfied with public education. She asked that the legislature reserve parental rights for parents.

[4:59:08 PM](#)

MADISON TRUITT, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska testified in support of SB 43 saying she is a professional behavioral health aide. She graduated from the University of Washington and focused her studies on child development, psychology, and sexual health psychology. She said there is significant data on the power of sex education. Age-appropriate sex education starts with children learning boundaries and how to say no to unsafe touch. Data also shows that the earlier a child enters sexual relations, the more likely they are to experience domestic violence and abuse. She said that studies and her work experience show that sex education programs reduce the rate of sexual activity, sexual risk behaviors, sexually transmitted infections, and teen pregnancies. She said sex education in the Netherlands is taught nationally in public schools and described the curriculum. Data from the Netherlands shows that sex education is highly effective. Teens in the Netherlands do not have sex at an earlier age than in other European countries. The rate of teen pregnancy has also decreased. Nine out of 10 teens use contraception to prevent STIs. She urged the passage of SB 43 to provide every child with a proper education because many parents censor their children.

[5:01:44 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN closed public testimony on SB 43.

[5:01:53 PM](#)

CHAIR TOBIN said a few comments needed clarification. In AS 12.30.360, the state board already establishes health and personal safety education guidelines. SB 43, on page 4, asks that the state board, in conjunction with parents, provide guidelines for personal safety, as mentioned in the fiscal note. Additionally, under AS 14.03.016 (a)(5), parents can review the content of activities, classes, performance standards, or programs in public schools.

[5:02:45 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON thanked everyone who testified. She said SB 43 is an important time-critical piece of legislation that she first introduced in 2019. She is grateful it received a hearing.

5:03:32 PM

CHAIR TOBIN held SB 43 in committee.

5:04:23 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Tobin adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting at 5:04 p.m.