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June 7th, 2017

The Honorable Shirley Weber
California State Capitol, Room 3123
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 2601 – as introduced SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Weber:

On behalf of the Free Speech Coalition, we support AB 2601, which sets a foundational baseline for sexual health education in charter schools while maintaining significant flexibility for charters to decide what curriculum they adopt, what specific grades to provide instruction, and other curricular elements. AB 2601 enhances the California Healthy Youth Act (CHYA) (AB 329, Weber - 2015), which mandates that CA public school students receive comprehensive sexual health education and HIV prevention education at least once in middle school and in high school; instruction must be accessible for students with disabilities and English learners. The research is clear that young people need sexual health education: more than half of CA students are sexually active in the 12th grade; CA's growing STI rates are highest in young people ages 15-24; nearly 12% and 10% of CA high school students experience sexual dating violence and physical dating violence, respectively.

As California seeks to address sexual harassment and abuse, comprehensive sexual health education—with its focus on healthy relationships, consent, and challenging negative gender stereotypes—is essential for preventing these negative behaviors before they start. A recent study found that sexual health education that addresses gender and power leads to better health outcomes for young people. Comprehensive sexual health education also supports student health in myriad other ways. For example, between 2015, when CHYA was enacted, and 2017, the percentage of sexually active CA students who used birth control increased. LGBT-inclusive education has been shown to have a positive effect on school climate and make LGBT youth feel safer.

Unfortunately, California's growing charter student population is not receiving the comprehensive sexual health education these youths need to succeed and stay healthy. California now has 1,275 charter schools, which serve 10% of California's student population. Charter schools educate a diverse and often underserved student population: 59% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and 72% are students of color. Latinos making up more than half of all charter students (51%). African Americans are a larger percentage of the charter school population (8%) than of traditional public schools (5%).

Quality sex education is especially critical for low-income communities and communities of color, which are affected by systemic discrimination, poverty, lack of access to health care, and lifelong health disparities. At a time when federal funding for adolescent sexual and reproductive health is being cut,



California needs to do more to ensure that charter school students have the same access to comprehensive sexual health education as all other public school students. A 2017 study found that 85% of San Diego charter schools provided some sexual health education, but many failed to cover essential CHYA topics: only 53% provided instruction on birth control; 35% provided information on sexual orientation; and 29% educated students about talking with parents about sex and relationships.

For all of these reasons the Free Speech Coalition is pleased to support AB 2601.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the left.

Eric Paul Leue
Executive Director

cc: Members and Committee Staff,
Senate Education Committee