

**Testimony of Rabbi Debbie Stiel
Temple Beth Sholom, Topeka KS
Opposing House Bill 2199
House Education Committee
February 17, 2015**

Dear Committee Members,

I believe House Bill 2199 to be a huge step in the wrong direction. We know that knowledge is power. We want our kids to have the knowledge needed in order to protect their own bodies. Rather than take a chance that our kids will be given wrong information by their peers, we can make sure that they learn about their own bodies, the opposite sex, pregnancy and sexual diseases and how to avoid these by teaching them the correct information in school. Parents right now can have their kids opt out of receiving that information if they have a strong reason to oppose it being taught. But we, citizens of Kansas, have very strong reasons for wanting to ensure that at least the majority of the kids get this knowledge. We know that teen pregnancy is up. We know that sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise. We know that kids need good information in order to stay safe and to help them make good decisions. It is our responsibility to make sure our Kansas kids get good, accurate information at an age-appropriate time. This is best done by the schools.

I want to tell you that I have a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and 5 years of post-graduate study. You might think, therefore, that as a highly educated person, I would be well prepared to tell my 2 sons about matters of sexuality at the right age. But the truth is, I don't have as much pedagogic knowledge on sex education as the school educators do. And I don't know all the latest info on STIs. I don't think that most parents do. School educators are the ones best equipped to share these fundamentals. Parents can fill in about values and add the important additional information that they want to. But we should be doing everything we can to make sure that this information about the body and about pregnancy and pregnancy prevention and sexual infections is shared with EVERY kid who we can reach. This is undoubtedly among the most important information that we can convey to them in a school year. It is wrong to make sex education opt in because too many kids will fall through the cracks. Sex education is too central a part of life to make it an opt-in offering.

Thank you,

Rabbi Debbie Stiel