



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

## Senate Democratic Conference Backs Statewide Sex Education Initiative

MALCOLM A. SMITH June 10, 2008

*Senate Democrats urge Republican-led Senate to pass the Healthy Teens Act to fund age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education at local schools*

(Albany, NY)-With six out of ten high school students having sex before they graduate, Senate Democrats, parents, educators and child health care advocates pushed for bipartisan passage of the Healthy Teens Act to provide a comprehensive sex education curriculum in public schools.

The Healthy Teens Act would set up a local-option grant program through the state Department of Health to fund comprehensive, age-appropriate and medically accurate sexuality education. Individual school districts, boards of cooperative education services (BOCES), school-based health centers and local community-based organizations would be eligible to apply for money to be determined by the legislature.

Senate Education Committee Ranking member Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) said that the Healthy Teens Act is needed because it opens up the door for targeted and responsible discussion of both abstinence and contraception, coupled with parental involvement, and will reverse erroneous information exchanged each day by teens in the

hallways of our schools.

"Research demonstrates that comprehensive sex education, which teaches both abstinence and contraception, is most effective at reducing teen pregnancy and reducing risk for HIV infection and other sexually-transmitted diseases," said Senator Oppenheimer. "It's time to get this approach into New York schools that need it and want it. That is why I am supporting the Healthy Teens Act."

Senator Oppenheimer was joined by Senators Craig Johnson (D-Long Island) and Velmanette Montgomery (D-Brooklyn), among other members of the Senate Democratic Conference today, calling on the Senate Majority to pass legislation to fund comprehensive age-appropriate sex education at public schools throughout the state.

"We in New York are struggling with some serious problems: our state has the highest number of teen pregnancies in the nation and the most HIV infections of any state," said Senator Oppenheimer. "Six out of ten teens in New York State have had sex by high school graduation. And one out of four teen girls in the United States has a sexually transmitted infection."

Senator Craig M. Johnson, (D-Nassau) said, "Under this measure, teens would be receiving the correct information to make smart decisions, while parents and the community at-large rightly remain in the driver's seat. I respect Senator George Winner's wisdom in sponsoring this legislation. I am asking the majority leadership to recognize this bill's bipartisan support and bring it to a vote on the Senate floor."

Key parts of the comprehensive Healthy Teens Act include:

- Include parental involvement and encourage family communication;
- Promote self-esteem and the importance of making responsible decisions about sexuality;
- Promote the 'value of abstinence';
- Provide medically accurate information about sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy prevention

Studies report 90 percent of parents say they don't know how to talk to their kids about sex. Healthy Teens programs would be developed with input from parents and family members.

Senator Montgomery said: "There is no denying that our young people are talking about and engaging in sexual activity. We need to replace dialogues about abstinence-only with educational talks about sexuality that will empower our children to make smart choices about their personal health.

Montgomery is a long-time supporter of school-based health centers where young children and teens receive primary medical care and mental health services.

JoAnn M. Smith, president and CEO of Family Planning Advocates of New York State, said: "Parents want their children to get honest, accurate sex education in school. We have a duty to provide teens with the basic health information they need to make good decisions throughout their lives. Let's not let another school year end without passing the Healthy Teens Act."

Dr. Carrin E. Schotter-Thal, MD, FAAP representing the American Academy of Pediatrics, District II, New York State said: "Young people are continually exposed to sexually explicit information through television, movies magazines and the Internet. They need access to understandable and accurate information to build their personal capacity to make informed decisions about their health and sexual activity."

The bill passed the Assembly with a vote of 130 to 14 and passed the Senate Health Committee May 20 by a vote of 13-4: this is the farthest the Healthy Teens Act has ever come in the legislative process. Senate Democrats are urging their colleagues across the aisle to move the legislation before the end of this year's legislative session.

Senator Oppenheimer concluded: "We can't keep our head in the sand. Education can be the best form of preventive medicine, and the Healthy Teens Act will help schools, parents, and youth work together on sexuality and responsible decision making."