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Good afternoon, chairman and committee members

My name is Mary Beth Bonacci. I am a speaker and educator. Over the past 33 years, I have spoken to several hundred thousand teenagers — if not over a million — on the topics of love, relationships and sexuality.

I am here today to ask for your "NO" vote on HB 19-1032

Let me tell you one thing I have learned from all of the years I spent with these kids. Even up into high school, they innately hold a very deep sense of the inherent beauty, intimacy and privacy of sexuality. They want to learn about it, but their maturity and preparation to hear explicit details about it happens at vastly different ages, and they are often uncomfortable discussing it in large, mixed-gender environments — especially if they are not yet mature enough to receive the information.

Of course children need to receive detailed, medically-accurate education about human sexuality. But because it is so intimately tied to the deepest parts of the person, that education should happen in setting respectful of their privacy and of the values of their families and their cultures.

Many of the issues surrounding sexuality, abortion and gender — issues mandated for "neutral" discussion in HB 19-1032 — are controversial, highly personal, and best handled by parents who know their children best, who love them, who are in tune with what information their children are prepared to hear, and who are entitled to impart the values of their families, their culture and their faith in these sensitive areas. It is these parents, then, who should be in control of the content and timing of that education. Those parents can then, as they have up until now, work in concert with local school boards to develop educational guidelines that best fit the children in that community, and to create safety nets for children whose parents are not available or not providing that formation at home.

This is best accomplished by leaving decisions about sex education to individual schools and local school boards.

HB 19-1032 also calls for oversight by an 8 member panel that is representative of neither the parents nor the local community. In addition, the guidelines clearly normalize teen sexual activity, in a state where nearly 77% of teens are currently abstaining from sexual activity and teen birth rates have plummeted 60% and remain at record lows. I predict those numbers will reverse after the passage of HB 19-1032.

What Colorado has been doing up to now is working. We allow decisions about sexuality education to be largely made at the local level, where parents have maximum input and control in what their children are being taught. Mandating one set of standards statewide is not in the best interest of Colorado's youth or their families.

I understand that the program has a strong and laudible anti-bullying focus. But that goal could be easily achieved within broader anti-bullying programming, without the detailed and invasive sexual information mandates of HB 19-1032.

Again, I urge you to vote NO on house bill 19-1032, which usurps the role of parents and local communities in insuring their children receive sexuality education that conforms with their values and the values of their culture.

