

Parents' Rights Considered

The Massachusetts Legislature is considering a Parents Rights Bill, which would require parental notice and consent before public school students could be exposed to programs that address "morally or religiously sensitive topics." The bill, AN ACT TO REAFFIRM THE RIGHT OF P ARENTS TO CONTROL THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN AND TO PROVIDE FOR PRIVACY PROTECTION (House Bill 1817), is a response to the increasing number of school districts which distribute contraceptives to adolescents, in most cases without the knowledge and approval of parents, and which subject students to graphic and controversial AIDS education, sex education, and homosexual programs.

The proposed law would mandate a 10 day notification period for parents before such programs could be introduced and would give parents the right to withdraw their children if they find the material to be presented morally objectionable. The burden of securing parental consent would be on the public school.

Catholic League Operations Director C. Joseph Doyle hailed the measure as "a long overdue defense of parental authority and religious freedom" and characterized it as "a necessary remedy to the aggressive intrusions of special interests into public education." "In a free society, the values of parents ought to prevail over those of the state in the moral and religious upbringing of children," Doyle said. "When the government, acting through the public schools, gives a Catholic child a condom, or tells that student that homosexual behavior is a morally acceptable option, then the state is effectively encouraging Catholic children to violate their religious beliefs, and to ignore the authority and religious convictions of their parents."