

## *Out in the Cold: Comprehensive Sex Education Advocacy in Louisiana*

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**Abstract:** The Louisiana Adolescent Reproductive Health Coalition (LARHC) was formed in 2015 with the goal of advocating for legislation that would require comprehensive sex education throughout the state. Louisiana has some of the highest rates of STIs and teen pregnancy in the nation and members of LARHC believe improved sex education could help alleviate this problem. However, despite their convictions and hard work, members of LARHC, including Kendra LeSar and Julie Schwam Harris, have been unable to sway the legislature to pass any bills in support of comprehensive sex education. This case explores the history of sex education in America and Louisiana, the formation of LARHC, the opposition they face, and the strategies they have used to try to pass legislation over the past several years. The ultimate question remains, what strategies should comprehensive sex education advocates use to have the best chance at passing a bill in the upcoming legislative session? Additionally, more generally, what strategies are available to small movements in politically hostile environments?

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In May 2017, Kendra LeSar, Julie Schwam Harris, and several other members of the Louisiana Adolescent Reproductive Health Coalition (LARHC) walked out of the Louisiana Senate in dismal spirits. They had been working for months to implement legislation that would improve sex education throughout the state. They had coordinated advocacy with public health professionals, community organizations, and elected officials. They also strategized extensively with consultants who had had success implementing comprehensive sex education laws in other states. Yet the bill they were supporting failed to make it out of the Senate.

Schwam Harris in particular had been working to advance women's rights in Louisiana's conservative political climate for years—several months previously she was moved to tears on the Senate floor testifying in favor of a minimum wage increase. She and everyone else in LARHC knew that all battles for progressive legislation in Louisiana were hard fought. Additionally, it was clear to them how important their current cause was to the youth in their communities. In 2015, Louisiana ranked 1st in incidence of syphilis and gonorrhea, 2<sup>nd</sup> in chlamydia, 11<sup>th</sup> in HIV diagnoses, and had the 6<sup>th</sup> highest rate of teen pregnancy (CDC 2015). Despite this, sex education is not mandatory and mostly focuses on abstinence when it is taught. However, after massive effort resulted in minimal progress toward passing a comprehensive sex education bill, it was unclear to members of LARHC whether the time and money spent on such a seemingly futile cause should be continued. And if they did choose to keep working for improved sex education, were there any strategies to pass legislation that had a prayer of working?

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<sup>1</sup> All information about LARHC obtained from interviews with Kendra LeSar on October 20, 2017 and December 5, 2017.

Thus, as the 2018 Louisiana legislative session approaches, LeSar, Schwam Harris, and other progressive public health advocates in the Louisiana Adolescent Reproductive Health Coalition must decide what legislative strategy to take as a political minority in a controversial climate.

### **History of Sex Education**

The history of sex education in the United States goes back to the nineteenth century. At the federal level, the Public Health Service began to develop sex education programs in the 1880s in response to a fear of publicly declining sexual morals. Both public and private sex education initiatives began to emerge more rapidly in World War I, when American soldiers contracted “venereal” diseases in large numbers, to the extent that some writers argued that Germany was not the real enemy, but rather promiscuous and immoral women (Lord 2010). This scapegoating of women differed from early sex education efforts, which sought to protect women and the family while blaming immigrants for degrading American culture (Lord 2010).

As rates and awareness of STIs increased post-WWI, and it became clear that infections affected more than just hyper-promiscuous women and soldiers, support grew for universal knowledge about sex and STIs (Lord 2010). Sex education programs consistently focused on good morals and wholesome marriages with varying amounts of information on condoms, contraception, and medically accurate information about STIs (Lord 2010). Both public and private entities, such as Planned Parenthood, developed a range of sex education materials. The curriculum used in schools depended on communities’ interests (Lord 2010).

By the 1970s, the federal government provided the most funding for, and thereby influence on, sex education initiatives. With the emergence of the Religious Right, the election of Ronald Reagan, and the appointment of fundamentalist Christian Dr. Everett Koop to the position of Surgeon General, a massive expansion of government funding ensured the dominance of Abstinence-Only Until Marriage (AOUM) programs. The Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) and Title V Abstinence Education programs together provided about \$160 million per year to various state and community AOUM programs, and through these and other programs, the government spent over \$1.5 billion on AOUM education between 1996 and 2009. These programs continued despite Representative Waxman’s (R-CA) 2004 report “The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs,” which revealed that these programs often contained “false, misleading, or distorted information about reproductive health” and “medical misinformation..., fear and shame tactics..., [and] stereotypes about gender roles” (SIECUS 2005). A plethora of additional research has also confirmed the ineffectiveness of AOUM programs (Santelli et al. 2017); however, these programs are still widely prevalent, particularly in the South (Lord 2010).

By 2016, agreeing with Representative Waxman’s report and other scientific research on the effectiveness of AOUM programs (Santelli et al. 2017), President Obama eliminated all federal funding for abstinence-only sex education (SIECUS 2016). In lieu of these programs, Obama created the President’s Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (PTPP) and the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) (SIECUS 2016). As the names imply, PTPP provides \$110 million per year for public and private medically accurate and age-appropriate pregnancy prevention programs, and PREP provides \$75 million per year for medically accurate and age-appropriate sex education. These types of comprehensive curricula teach about condoms, contraception, and abstinence as methods of avoiding unintended pregnancy and STIs, as well as including information to help young people develop their interpersonal and communication skills

(Advocates For Youth 2001). Both the PTPP and PREP initiatives provide money to fund programs in schools that apply for a grant (SEICUS 2009).

Despite the new availability of funds for comprehensive sex education during the Obama administration, many states had trouble passing legislation that allowed these programs to be developed. Advocates for comprehensive sex education used a variety of strategies to advance their cause. In Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, parents spearheaded a campaign to convince the school board, and then the state legislature, to adopt a comprehensive sex education curriculum with an online petition of over 200 parents. The Pennsylvania legislature eventually passed a bill mandating medically accurate sex education in public schools on HIV and other STDs in 2010 (SEICUS 2010). Mississippi passed a bill in 2011 mandating public middle and high schools to implement sex education, and though the education had to be abstinence-only or “abstinence-plus,” this was still considered a major victory at the time (Mississippi Congress 2011). The fight for better sex education in Mississippi then and now is lead primarily by non-profit advocacy organizations such as Mississippi First and Teen Health Mississippi (Mississippi First 2017; Teen Health Mississippi 2017).

Despite the hope generated within the comprehensive sex education movement by the strides made during Obama’s presidency, these victories have not been upheld under the Trump administration. President Trump has recently cut over \$200 million from PTPP program and has expressed preference for AOUM education (Strauss 2017). President Trump’s selection of Governor of Indiana Mike Pence, an evangelical Christian, for the vice presidency also sent a signal about the overall values of the administration regarding sex and sex education.

However, there are more tactics that the comprehensive sex education movement can employ. Dr. Benjamin Dworkin of Rider University suggests that generally the majority political party in conservative areas, which favor abstinence-based programs, have an advantage due to better coverage of their agendas by the media. The minority parties promoting comprehensive sex education can use “flamboyant” messages to also gain news coverage and agitate the majority leaders (Dworkin 2015, 8). Dr. Brian Webb argues that the minority party should use their control over the congressional procedure called the motion to recommit, which provides a final opportunity for the House to debate a bill before it is voted on. This entails cross-pressuring members of the majority party to make them look like they are changing opinions on a bill, which may support a policy victory or better election results (Webb 2012). Dworkin and Webb’s suggestions are two of many complex political science theories on minority political tactics that can be applied to a broad range of situations. They highlight the potential power of in depth knowledge of the political system for minority advocacy groups hoping to make progress on their agenda.

### **Specifics of Louisiana Legislation**

Sex education is not mandatory in Louisiana. Schools that provide sex education have generally followed the same sex education trends as the United States on the whole over the past 90 years. Curricula increased in prevalence and accuracy over time, until the 1980s, when abstinence-only programs began to be implemented and Louisiana began receiving funding first from the Adolescent Family Life Act, then from both CBAE and Title V (Howell 2007; Advocates for Youth 2017). Generally, the state’s sex education policy erred on the more conservative side, to the point that at times during the Obama administration, the state legislation surrounding sex education curricula conflicted with national priorities. For instance, both the PTPP and PREP programs require medically accurate information in programs that receive federal funding, but

Louisiana state laws do not require sex education to be medically accurate (SIECUS 2009; Guttmacher 2016). Therefore, many public schools' programs were not eligible for federal funding, which made the programs low quality or nonexistent. Additional Louisiana-specific sex education guidelines include:

- HIV education is not mandatory
- Sex education does not need to be “culturally unbiased”
- It may not counsel for or advocate abortion in any way
- It may not show graphic images of homosexual sex
- Educators may not distribute contraceptives (Guttmacher 2016).

Louisiana's resistance to implement comprehensive sex education is particularly concerning because of the state's sexual and reproductive health statistics. In 2015, Louisiana had the 7<sup>th</sup> highest rate of teen pregnancy in the nation, with a birth rate of 37.5 out of 1000 teens aged 15 to 19 (Louisiana LDH Office of Public Health STD/HIV Program 2015). There were over 1,100 diagnoses of HIV, 15 cases of syphilis per 100,000 people, 695.2 cases of chlamydia per 100,000 people, and 221.1 cases of gonorrhea per 100,000 people (CDC 2015). These staggering numbers represent some of the highest rates of STIs in the nation, rates that have been growing steadily over the past several years (Louisiana LDH Office of Public Health STD/HIV Program 2015).

This is a concerning trend, which suggests the need for prevention efforts, but it has not led to any recent legislative action to change restrictive sex education policies. However, that is not to say that legislators have not tried, particularly in recent years. In 2013, a bill was passed to create a task force to evaluate sex education curricula, however the task force did not produce a concrete plan. In 2014, legislators proposed three bills concerning sex education. One would have mandated comprehensive, medically accurate sex education, and a second would have mandated the Department of Education to administer the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), an anonymous health risk survey on sexual behaviors to ensure that programs address teens' actual behaviors. The bills, proposed by Representative Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge), both died before making it to the Senate. The final 2014 bill, also by Rep. Smith, required state agencies to meet and discuss strategies to reduce teen pregnancy. It passed, but like the bill in 2013 that created a task force, this meeting produced no concrete action.

In 2015, legislators wrote four more bills. One, proposed by Representative Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans), would have required public schools in Orleans Parish to teach sex education to 7-12<sup>th</sup> graders. Two more similar bills, one in the House and one in the Senate, proposed authorizing the YRBS survey again, but this time, only for New Orleans. These bills were written by Representative Bishop and Senator J.P. Morrell (D-New Orleans), respectively. It is almost as if New Orleans legislators were proposing New Orleans as a pilot program for policies that other legislators were concerned about implementing for their own constituents. However, these bills still did not pass. The final bill for 2015, by Rep. Thomas Carmody (R-Shreveport), was passed as a compromise, mandating state boards to report on the effectiveness of AOUM curricula (see Appendix A for details on sex education bills 2013-2017).

### **Formation of LARHC**

After suffering another year of losses in the legislative session of spring 2015, comprehensive sex education advocates realized they needed to organize themselves better to make more effective progress toward their shared goals. In June 2015, Marsha Broussard of the *Women Leading Change* © Newcomb College Institute

Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI), along with several others, founded the Louisiana Adolescent Reproductive Health Coalition, or LARHC (pronounced “lark”). Before working at the LPHI, Marsha worked in rural health care and as the director of Healthy Start, a program to assist young and first-time mothers. At LPHI she ran several school health programs including 4 Real Health, a teen pregnancy prevention project that offered sex education as a summer program. She was frustrated by the fact that she could not implement this program in schools where she could access the most vulnerable students for whom 4 Real Health was designed. This frustration and passion for young peoples’ health motivated her political activism. She is only peripherally involved in LARHC’s work now, but was an integral early member (Kendra LeSar, personal communication, 12/5/17).

Several of the other integral LARHC members are also affiliated with LPHI, including Kendra LeSar. With a background in health education and communication, she has worked as both the School Wellness Program Coordinator and the School Engagement Manager at LPHI for seven years. She loves her work and cares a lot about it, saying, “It would be hard to do if I didn’t care. It is so frustrating that everyone involved needs a certain level of passion and commitment, because it’s easy to give up” (K. LeSar, personal communication, October 20, 2017). She is the self-dubbed “facilitator” of LARHC and is critical to the day-to-day functioning of the coalition. She schedules conference calls, coordinates with members who are geographically separated, and organizes their online platform, Podio, for communication.

Beyond LPHI, there are other public health professionals involved in advocacy. Often, they are delegates for their respective organizations but are committed to sex education advocacy based on their own values. Some are representatives from HIV care organizations, whose interest in sex education comes from a desire to prevent more cases of HIV. Some come from sexual violence prevention organizations, such as Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response and the Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault. Some are health educators themselves with organizations like the Area Health Education Center.

Finally, LARHC also includes passionate individuals from the community who understand the importance of educating teens to help them engage in safer sex and become more empowered. Julie Schwam Harris was crucial to the initiation of LARHC. She is a volunteer advocate who has spent her entire career working on women’s empowerment. Currently, she works part-time as the regional advisor for Louisiana and Mississippi for the Packard foundation, which funds much of LPHI’s work doing school-based sex education and also partly funds LARHC. Within her job, she is praised for mentoring younger women and guiding her younger staff through the political advocacy process. Kendra LeSar mentioned that Julie recently asked her, “Who are you training to do your job when you are ready for bigger and better things?” (K. LeSar, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Her desire to bring up the next cohort of advocates ensures lasting strength within the movement. Additionally, she has done work with several international women’s organizations and the Louisiana Agenda for Women. By leveraging her many connections, she has helped recruit members beyond public health organizations to ensure that LARHC has a diverse base of participants. Because of her, LARHC includes members from Lift Louisiana, a political advocacy organization, and the New Orleans Abortion Fund. Julie also runs a list-serv email with updates on advocacy and engages members to join the movement and stay involved (K. LeSar, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Like Broussard, LeSar, and Schwam Harris, nearly all LARHC members volunteer their time in service of the coalition’s goals. Overall, the organization is a loose network of passionate professionals, but they have limited time and resources.

### **Challenges to Action**

LARHC's major goal is to pass comprehensive sex education legislation and to implement comprehensive sex education in schools. This is very difficult because most legislators are in favor of AOUM sex education, but they face several other major challenges beyond the hostile political environment.

Because most of LARHC's members do their advocacy work on a volunteer basis outside of their full-time jobs, they are constantly struggling to commit the time and resources to the effort that it requires. Many members live far away from each other throughout Louisiana, making communication and coordination challenging. Often, they only have a few in-person meetings per year, which makes it difficult to develop and maintain relationships between members. Additionally, the legislature does not release the dates and times of committee hearings on bills until less than 24 hours in advance. This short notice makes it difficult to mobilize enough people to commute to Baton Rouge and show up in support of comprehensive sex education bills. Because most of LARHC's members are unpaid it is also challenging to incentivize people to commit to the work—many people are unwilling to take time out of their personal lives to engage in a frustrating movement where few victories are won. These challenges sometimes make it necessary for LARHC to scale back the size of their goals<sup>2</sup>.

Another issue that LARHC faces is their status as a non-profit. As a 501(c)3, they receive tax breaks but in return can only spend a small proportion of their budget on lobbying every year. This means that they can speak to legislators about the importance of sex education but are limited in how much they can mention about specific bills that are up for debate. When LARHC representatives meet with legislators and say, "it is important that you support sex education access" rather than "it is important that you vote in favor of HB 359," usually legislators understand what they imply—but sometimes the message can get lost in translation.

To address their shortage of time, resources, and ability to lobby, in 2017 LPHI hired Reagan Carter, who previously served as their legislative consultant. Before starting at LPHI she was the Director of Public Affairs for Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast, and before that worked for the Louisiana Department of Education. This experience is both an asset and a hindrance to LARHC. Reagan is very well acquainted with the political process, who Louisiana politicians are and how they lean, and how sex education laws will affect schools, but she is also seen as inextricably connected to Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood is a controversial organization, and this places her under high scrutiny by the opposition (Manchester 2016). She has become vital to LARHC, doing behind-the-scenes work to keep up conversations with legislators about sex education, even when LARHC is not meeting regularly and the Louisiana Congress is not in session.

As the facilitator, LeSar worries that in general, it is "the LPHI show" at LARHC meetings or on conference calls. She is a "people-person" and fairly non-adversarial, but as facilitator she must sometimes interject to make sure everyone's voices are heard. Forcing participation in this way can sometimes be awkward. She also struggles to maintain momentum within the group (K. LeSar, personal communication, December 5, 2017). Even though they have not yet passed a bill, they must celebrate small victories, such as getting a bill out of the senate, or having a Republican congress member testify for them. However, lifting moral is very challenging, particularly when their political opponents are so effective at blocking any progress toward LARHC's goals.

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<sup>2</sup>K. LeSar, personal communication, October 30, 2017

### **LARHC's Opposition**

There is evidence that current sex education programming does not address public health trends that show increased rates of STI prevalence and teen pregnancy, but no legislative gains have been made in support of comprehensive sex education. This can be partly attributed to the strong, active, well-organized opposition to LARHC from multiple angles.

A major factor contributing to the lack of progress toward comprehensive sex education is the generally conservative Louisiana culture. Many residents are skeptical of implementing policies that challenge traditional values and believe in maintaining the status quo as it pertains to family structures and sexual relationships (Dahms 2014). Religion is also an indicator of the conservative culture of Louisiana, as religion is linked to conservative party affiliation (Pew Research Center 2015). Eighty-four percent of Louisianans identify as Christian, and 71% say religion is very important in their daily lives (Pew Research Center 2015).

State legislators present another barrier to progress on comprehensive sex education. The majority of state senators and representatives are Republican, as are all Louisiana senators and representatives to the federal government except Cedric Richmond of New Orleans. Most Republicans ran on a party platform that emphasizes traditional family values (Republican Party of Louisiana 2017). The dominant conservatism in the legislature suggests the conservative nature of many Louisiana voters.

A State Senator strongly against the comprehensive sex education cause is Senator John Milkovich, a Republican from Shreveport. Regarded by some as a “conspiracy theorist” (K. LeSar, personal communication, 10/30/17), many sex education advocates are concerned about the validity of his political actions. He referred to HB 359, the 2015 bill proposing the requirement of public middle and high schools in New Orleans to teach sex education, “a toxic maelstrom of immorality” (Dreilinger 2017). Due to his frequently radical stances, his fellow Republican Party members often do not consider his arguments; therefore, it was surprising to LARHC when he influenced the discussion on comprehensive sex education legislation (K. LeSar, personal communication, October 30, 2017).

Arguably the most powerful opponent to comprehensive sex education bills is the Louisiana Family Forum, a 501(c)4 organization whose slogan is “Your Voice for Traditional Families!” They are a political lobbying organization “committed to defending faith, freedom, and the traditional family in the great state of Louisiana!” (LA Family Forum 2017). As a 501(c)4, they can talk explicitly about bills with legislators, and they have an entire wing of their organization devoted to lobbying politicians to propose, support, or oppose specific bills. These direct activities make it much easier to reach and sway legislators. Their website is well organized, with scorecards for each state senator and representative based on their values, regularly scheduled events, a newsletter, and guides to teach people to argue for conservative values. The group focus is on issues beyond sex education, such as criminal justice reform, but keeping discussion of sexuality out of schools seems to be one of their highest priorities. As such, the group does an excellent job at addressing it—when committee hearings are held to discuss sex education bills they mobilize parents *en masse* to attend. When constituents enter these hearings, they fill out either a green index card, indicating support for the bill, a red card, indicating opposition to the bill, or a white card, signifying neutrality. Attendees may also check a box on the card if they would like to speak to explain their opinion. Some Family Forum representatives speak on the bill, but their true power comes in numbers. When the legislators discussing the bill see that the number of red opposition cards far surpasses the number of green support cards, they take it as a signal to stop the bill from passing

### **Advocacy Strategies**

Shortly after it was founded, before the 2016 legislative session began, LARHC worked with two consultants to hone their advocacy strategy. Diana Rhodes was from Advocates for Youth, an experienced national non-profit and advocacy group dedicated to expansion of comprehensive sex education. Danene Sorace was an independent consultant who used to work for Answer, an organization out of Rutgers University that trains sex education teachers. Diana and Danene understood what it takes to make progress on comprehensive sex education in conservative states, unlike some advisors that work on a national level. It was challenging to identify consultants who understood the severity of the political hostility that LARHC faced and would offer advice toward attainable goals, however Diana and Danene took into consideration the environment in which they were working. They met with a handful of LARHC personnel and together decided that they needed to narrow their priorities, choosing among several options.

Sex education is technically legal in Louisiana, but its implementation relies on individually motivated schools, which are limited by lack of funding and resources. Instead of working on political advocacy, LARHC could leverage its public health and education professionals to push and aid schools in better implementing sex education to the extent that the law allowed.

LARHC could also use their limited lobbying budget to encourage the few sex education advocates in the legislature, like Rep. Patricia Smith, Sen. Wesley Bishop, and Sen. J.P. Morrell, to propose bills for several policy options. They could decide to go big, like the bill in 2014 that attempted to mandate comprehensive sex education in every public school. This would be the most challenging to pass.

They could also prioritize smaller goals. The Office of Adolescent Health has funding for teen pregnancy prevention programs through President Obama's PTPP program, but state laws prohibit these programs from being implemented in schools. LARHC could work with legislators to support a bill that allows these pregnancy prevention programs in schools. Alternatively, they could again attempt to pass a bill that allows the sexuality section of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) to be administered. This data collection would make Louisiana eligible for large CDC grants that fund evidence-based sex education programs, because without the data to assess and monitor teens' actions, the CDC would not grant any money. Winning this small victory would enable a large step toward more widespread sex education. Several of these strategies could also be pursued in combination, but this would spread resources very thin and detract from the importance of any one goal.

### **2016 and 2017 Legislative Sessions**

In the 2016 legislative session, after consulting with Diana Rhodes and Danene Sorace, LARHC decided to pursue the narrow goal of advocating for the sexuality component of the YRBS to be administered in public schools. In a two-pronged attempt, Rep. Patricia Smith introduced HB 402 in the House of Representatives, and Sen. Wesley Bishop introduced SB 218 in the Senate. Unlike the YRBS bill in 2014, which failed by a vote of 57-36, HB 402 narrowly made it through the House with a 53-40 vote but died in the Committee on Education in the Senate. SB 218 also died in the Senate Committee on Education.

In 2017, LARHC tried again, with the same strategy. However, circumstances changed somewhat before this legislative session to warrant another try with the same strategy. President Trump was elected in November of 2016, empowering the AOUM advocates' commitment to their cause. Throughout his term he will also likely cut many of the federal funding options for



comprehensive sex education, a fact that advocates on both sides of the sex education debate knew. As noted, he already cut over \$200 million in PTPP funding, meaning that the Louisiana Office of Adolescent Health's grant money for pregnancy prevention programs will run out in June 2018 (Strauss 2017). Instead of using it for PTPP, he has appropriated much of the \$200 million to fund and expand abstinence-based programs. The CDC's grant money has not been cut yet, but it is unclear what will happen over the course of President Trump's term. This makes LARHC feel that immediate success is even more imperative to counter the expansion of AOUM programs.

Another major change in 2017 involved two major players in the Louisiana legislature joining the fight for comprehensive sex education. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat, was elected as Governor of Louisiana in 2015. He is anti-abortion, and although many people with this stance are also in favor of abstinence-only education, he uses the reasoning that better sex education will allow teens to make better decisions, which will lead to less unintended pregnancies, resulting in fewer abortions. Therefore, he was willing to support LARHC and comprehensive sex education bills. Because LPHI hired Reagan Carter as a legislative strategist in 2017, the coalition could begin working with him and his staff directly, giving their mission more clout and visibility.

With more hope than 2015, LARHC worked with Senator Yvonne Colomb (D-Baton Rouge) to introduce of SB 85, again with the goal of mandating sexual risk questions on the YRBS. The bill made it out of both the Education and Health and Welfare Committees to a vote, but unfortunately it failed 14-22 on the Senate floor.

### **Preparing for 2018**

Experiencing loss after loss has been demoralizing for LARHC, particularly in the context of President Trump's administration rolling back related policies. However, channeling as much resilience as possible, LARHC will try again. LARHC has already made some strides since last year. Reagan Carter was hired as a full-time legislative strategist for the cause, and because she is an employee of LPHI she can bypass regulations that otherwise apply to LARHC due to its status as a non-profit. She is having a large impact on work supporting comprehensive sex education because LARHC is now able to collaborate directly with legislators and the office of the governor. Additionally, to prove that comprehensive sex education is desired by Louisiana voters, the Louisiana Public Health Institute conducted a survey of parents on whether they want their children to receive comprehensive, school-based sex education. In contrast to the state's perceived hyper-conservative culture, 84% of respondents do in fact want their children to receive comprehensive, medically accurate information (LPHI and IWES 2017). LARHC will now be able to present evidence to convince legislators to support the interests of their constituents.

Finally, now that he better understands the influence of Louisiana's political voices against comprehensive sex education, Governor John Bel Edwards is better prepared to work with Republican Party members to gain support for expanding sex education. Additionally, Rep. Dan Claitor (R-Baton Rouge), a strong anti-abortion advocate, has recently come to support comprehensive sex education along the same line of reasoning as Governor Edwards. This is particularly important because Democrats mostly spearhead the struggle for comprehensive sex education and crossing party lines can strengthen the movement.

Although Louisiana's political climate on sex education existed in a state of controversy at the end of 2017, the advocacy options available at LARHC's inception are still essentially the same. LARHC must once again return to the drawing board and decide what strategy to proceed with for the 2018 legislative session.

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## **Appendix A: Sex Education Bills 2013-2017 (Louisiana State Legislature 2018)**

### **2013**

- HCR 90
  - Authored by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge)
  - Creates a task force to study and evaluate the effectiveness of sexual health education programs used throughout the state and other states
  - Passed 91-0 in House, passed 32-0 in Senate

### **2014**

- HB 369
  - Authored by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge)
  - Provides relative to sex education instruction in public schools
    - See original bill text on [legis.la.gov](http://legis.la.gov), essentially would have mandated comprehensive sex education in public schools
  - Referred to House Committee on Education, Involuntarily deferred in committee
- HB 393
  - Authored by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge)
  - Authorizes a Dept. of Education survey of students regarding risk behaviors
    - YRBS
  - Failed House final passage 36-57
- HB 1068
  - Authored by Rep. Patricia Smith (D-Baton Rouge)
  - Requires certain state agencies to meet biannually to discuss and make recommendations in an effort to reduce teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases
  - Passed 88-0 in House

### **2015**

- HB 359
  - Authored by Rep. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans)
  - Requires public school governing authorities in Orleans Parish to offer sex education instruction to students in certain grades
  - Failed House final passage 34-59
- HB 326
  - Authored by Rep. Wesley Bishop (D-New Orleans)
  - Authorizes surveys of public school students in Orleans Parish regarding risk behaviors
    - YRBS
  - Referred to House Committee on Education, scheduled for floor debate, then notice removed. Current status: subject to call
- SB 31
  - Sen J.P. Morrell (D-New Orleans)
  - Authorizes surveys of public school students in Orleans Parish regarding risk behaviors

- Initially referred to House Committee on Education. Reported with amendments, recommitted to the Committee on House and Governmental Affairs. Current status: pending House and Governmental Affairs
- HR 69
  - Rep. Thomas Carmody (R-Shreveport)
  - Directs the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Health and Hospitals to report on the effectiveness of abstinence-emphasis sex education

## **2016**

- HB 402
  - Rep. Patricia Smith (D-New Orleans)
  - Authorizes the state Dept. of Education and Dept. of Health and Hospitals to survey students regarding certain risk behavior associated with chronic health conditions
  - Passed the House 53-40. Ordered to and received by the Senate, referred to Committee on Education. Current status: pending Senate Education
- SB 218
  - Sen. Wesley Bishop
  - Authorizes the state Dept. of Education and Dept. of Health and Hospitals to survey students regarding certain risk behavior associated with chronic health conditions
  - Referred to the Committee on Education. Current status: pending Senate Education

## **2017**

- SB 85
  - Sen. Yvonne Colomb (D-Baton Rouge)
  - Authorizes the state Dept. of Education and Dept. of Health and Hospitals to survey students regarding certain risk behavior associated with chronic health conditions
  - Referred to the Committee on Education. Recommited to the Committee on Health and Welfare. Failed to pass 14-22.

## Appendix B: How A Bill Becomes A Law In Louisiana (Louisiana State Legislature 2017)

