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# Advocacy Toolkit for Florida HB 703/SB 926

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**SWOP Behind Bars supports** Florida House Bill 703 (**HB 703**) and its counterpart Senate Bill 926 (**SB 926**) which would greatly expand health education in public schools and repeal the abstinence-only mandate. We also advocate for **amending** these bills to include human trafficking education instead of passing HB 259/SB 982.

The House version is sponsored by Representative Stark (District 104), and the Senate version is sponsored by Senator Berman (District 31).

## Bill websites:

- HB 703: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2019/00703>
- SB 926: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2019/926>

## Language of FL HB 259/SB 982

Merged summary: "Education in Public Schools Concerning Human Sexuality; Creates "Florida Healthy Adolescent Act"; requires public schools that provide information or programs relating to human sexuality to provide information that meets certain criteria; provides for review of certain materials & students to be excused in certain circumstances; repealing provisions relating to health education and instruction in acquired immune deficiency syndrome, etc."

## Our Bill Analysis

### Florida Healthy Adolescent Act

These bills would create the "Florida Healthy Adolescent Act." The goals of the bill include promoting responsible decision-making about sexual health and healthy relationships, as well as reducing unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. It would do this by providing adolescents with scientifically-supported comprehensive sex education. This education would include:

- Human sexuality
- Family planning
- Pregnancy
- Preventing sexually transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS

The bills would require "comprehensive information," defined as information that:

- Helps adolescents understand puberty and stages of human development
- Helps adolescents protect their sexual and reproductive health and understand sexuality as a normal part of human development
- Helps adolescents make responsible decisions
- Is culturally-competent and age-appropriate
- Develops healthy body images and attitudes
- Encourages healthy life and relationship skills such as negotiation, refusal, overcoming

- peer pressure, and avoiding high-risk activities
- Promotes self-esteem and positive interpersonal skills to develop healthy behaviors and relationships
- Includes medically accurate information about all methods of contraception and their effectiveness rates including, but not limited to, abstinence

The bills define terms such as what constitutes "developmentally and age appropriate," "factual information," and "medically accurate information."

These bills would make the curriculum available to parents or guardians for review upon request. They would allow parents or guardians to make written requests to excuse students from the portions related to human sexuality; excused students may not be penalized or disciplined. Parents or guardians with a student enrolled at a particular school can file complaints with the school district if they believe the school is in non-compliance. The bill further elaborates upon this process.

## Repealing F.S. 1003.46

These bills would repeal F.S. 1003.46<sup>1</sup>. Under this current statute:

- Schools *may* provide instruction about AIDS as a specific area of health education, with the instruction including but not limited to known methods of transmission, symptoms, risk factors, and prevention.
- Whenever a school includes information on human sexuality, the school must:
  - "Teach abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage as the expected standard for all school-age students while teaching the benefits of monogamous heterosexual marriage"
  - "Emphasize that abstinence from sexual activity is a certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, including acquired immune deficiency syndrome, and other associated health problems"
  - Teach students they have the power to control their own behavior and encourage decisions based on "reasoning, self-esteem, and respect for others"
  - Provide age-appropriate material

## Our Points

These bills would modernize health education in Florida's public schools and base it upon scientific knowledge instead of religious morality. We cannot emphasize enough how much we support these bills.

- Unlike abstinence-only education, comprehensive sex education is proven to reduce unwanted pregnancies and STIs.
- Comprehensive education regarding healthy relationships, negotiation, and refusal would also help to reduce sexual and domestic violence as well as trafficking in the sex industry.
- The existing F.S. 1003.46 is homophobic, transphobic, and only supportive of sexual activity within a marriage between a cisgender man and a cisgender woman. This is extremely harmful to LGBTQIA+ youth and shames sexually active teenagers without educating them on how to protect their health. Thankfully, these bills would repeal it.

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<sup>1</sup> [1003.46 Health education; instruction in acquired immune deficiency syndrome](#)

- We suggest repealing F.S. 1003.42(2)(n) which also requires abstinence-only education<sup>2</sup>, as this would leave a loophole to continue those programs in public schools.
- We also suggest that the "Florida Healthy Adolescent Act" should make explicit rather than implicit that comprehensive education includes domestic violence, sexual assault, family abuse, and human trafficking. We advocate for ensuring the inclusion of this difficult but important material to ensure that adolescents are better able to protect themselves and support their peers. It would also help students to understand issues that may occur within their families and know that they are not responsible for them.
- Where such curriculum does not already exist, we advocate that all stages of curriculum development include sex workers as well as victims and survivors of various forms of interpersonal violence. These voices must always be included in material that speaks to their experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> [F.S. 1003.42\(2\)\(n\)](#) includes "an awareness of the benefits of sexual abstinence as the expected standard and the consequences of teenage pregnancy"