

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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February 21, 2018

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:
CDailey@liverpool.k12.ny.us

Craig Dailey
President
Liverpool Central School Board
195 Blackberry Road
Liverpool, NY 13090

Re: Ministry-led abstinence-only sex education

Dear President Dailey and School Board Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and our local District membership, to urge you to replace the school district's current sex education curriculum with one that has qualified instructors and appropriate, comprehensive content. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 31,000 members across the country, including more than 1,600 members in New York. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

Several concerned District parents contacted us to report that Liverpool Central School District middle schools offer abstinence-only sex education, taught by a minister and other volunteers from New Hope Family Services, a local crisis pregnancy center that refers to itself as a "Christian ministry."¹ The course includes religiously motivated lessons, such as lessons teaching that virginity is a "gift" that can be given only once, and that sexually active students can "reclaim" their virginity by pledging to be abstinent until marriage.²

New Hope Family Service's website does not indicate that any of their instructors have any nonreligious training, much less degrees that would qualify them to teach sex education at a public middle school. However, all volunteers are required to sign the ministry's Statement of Faith,³ which consists of

¹ web.archive.org/web/20170515160312/newhopefamilyservices.com/about-us/ (May 15, 2017) ("New Hope Family Services is a Christian Ministry . . ."); partner.newhopefamilyservices.com/get-involved/volunteer-opportunities ("There are several ways that you can become involved in the ministry at New Hope").

² newhopefamilyservices.com/abstinence-education.

³ partner.newhopefamilyservices.com/images/VolunteerRequest.pdf ("All volunteers will be required to sign New Hope's Statement of Faith").

religious statements that would be expected at a Christian church, but not at a public school or a medical center.⁴

Further, New Hope's website offers misleading and inaccurate information designed to further its religious anti-abortion agenda, and it presumably repeats this misinformation to your students. For instance, New Hope's website discusses the "morning-after pill," or "Plan B," and states that it "stops a new human life from growing. This is an abortion."⁵ It is simply untrue that the "morning-after pill" causes abortions, even under the religiously motivated (and medically inaccurate) definition of pregnancy beginning at fertilization.⁶

It is a great disservice to your students, and is even dangerous, to deprive them of comprehensive sex education, taught by qualified health educators, in favor of allowing a religious ministry to advance its faith-based mission by teaching your students a version of sex education that has been thoroughly discredited. Such denial of true sex education demonstrably leads to more teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. It is incumbent on you to provide your students with the sex education they deserve by replacing the New Hope curriculum with comprehensive, science-based sex education, taught by medical professionals rather than members of a faith-based anti-abortion ministry.

Crisis pregnancy centers promote religion

Numerous studies have shown that crisis pregnancy centers ("CPCs") often sacrifice sound medical advice and basic ethical standards to spread their religious message. In 2002, the Center for Reproductive Rights found that CPCs misinformed their clients about the consequences of abortions, including false claims that abortion causes breast cancer, sterility, and psychological damage.⁷ In 2006, U.S. Representative Henry Waxman released a study with similar findings, also disclosing that many CPCs incorrectly told clients that abortion would interfere with a woman's ability to bear children in the future.⁸ Studies in multiple states have found that CPCs incorrectly tell pregnant teens that condoms are ineffective in reducing pregnancy and the transmission of certain

⁴ partner.newhopefamilyservices.com/overview/statement-of-faith ("We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word Of God. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood," etc.).

⁵ newhopefamilyservices.com/be-informed/emergency-contraception.

⁶ See Kristina Gemzell-Danielsson, *Mechanism of action of emergency contraception*, CONTRACEPTION, Nov. 2010, Vol. 82, Issue 5, 404–409 (the morning after pill "acts through an effect on follicular development to delay or inhibit ovulation . . . [and does] not interfere with blastocyst function or implantation.").

⁷ Center for Reproductive Rights, *Crisis Pregnancy Centers Seek Public Funds and Legitimacy*, 11 REPROD. FREEDOM NEWS, July/Aug. 2002, at 4.

⁸ United States House of Representatives Committee On Government Reform, *False and Misleading Health Information Provided by Federally Funded Pregnancy Resource Centers* (2006), available at chsourcebook.com/articles/waxman2.pdf.

STDs, and that abortion causes mental illness.⁹ Joanne Rosen, an associate lecturer at the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, concluded an article about CPCs by writing that “collectively, [CPCs] practices jeopardize the health of women and their children, and a public health response is warranted.”¹⁰

These deceptive tactics are obviously employed to scare teens from using contraception or seeking abortions, both of which CPCs oppose for purely religious reasons. It would be inappropriate and irresponsible for a public school to encourage students to visit a CPC, much less to invite such a group to teach sex education classes to students.

Public schools exist to educate, not to indoctrinate. They may not allow a private religious organization access to other people’s children to further a religious agenda. If the Liverpool Central School District wishes to use sex education instructors or curriculum designers who are not LCSD employees, they should be *medical professionals* with science-based facts, not members of a faith-based anti-abortion ministry with an ax to grind. The LCSD must replace its current sex education classes and speakers with an appropriate, comprehensive, and science-based alternative. Please inform us in writing of the steps you take to address this concern so that we may notify our complainants.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-President

ALG:rdj

cc: School board members, *via* PRosier@liverpool.k12.ny.us;
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⁹ See, e.g., NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *Unmasking Fake Clinics, The Truth About Crisis Pregnancy Centers in California* (2010), available at prochoicecalifornia.org/assets/bin/pdfs/cpreport2010-revisednov2010.pdf.

¹⁰ Rosen, *The Public Health Risks of Crisis Pregnancy Centers, 2012*, PERSP. ON SEXUAL AND REPRO. HEALTH, Sept. 2010, 40(3):201–4.