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The Center for HIV Law & Policy

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The Professionals On Whom Our Health Depends Need Training on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sexual Health

Statement of Support for A10380A (Rosenthal, L.)

June 30, 2020

At the close of a Pride Month marked by historic demonstrations calling for the end of racial hate and discrimination, we want to highlight another form of discrimination that has hurt many of us and must be called out; and a bill that would begin to address the problem.

Ignorance about sexuality and sexual health creates health barriers for many New Yorkers. For decades, we have experienced, or heard of others' experience: a health care provider asking a lesbian about her last pregnancy test; the palpable discomfort of a physician examining a transgender woman; the doctor who refused to prescribe Viagra to a gay man living with HIV; the gynecologist who refuses to examine a woman living with HIV, or who responds with judgment to that same woman who wants to conceive a child; adolescent care providers who won't or don't know how to talk to their young patients about sex and how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases; doctors uncomfortable with discussing the sexual lives and health of people who rely on their guidance for their well-being.

New York State continuing medical education requirements are woefully limited compared to many other states. Sexual orientation, gender identity and the basics of sexual health must be a part of this education. For decades, many of us have heard that most doctors just aren't comfortable talking to their patients – especially their lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender patients – about sex. For decades, too many of us have accepted as a given that those who are among the most educated, best paid and most respected of our professional class, whose profession is health, are ignorant about and uncomfortable with care related to the one health issue that is universal to all of us: our sexual health. Years of voluntary programs to increase understanding of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity have failed to move the needle on this extraordinary failing in our medical profession. It is no exaggeration to say that the consequences of this unaddressed ignorance have cost much harm and many lives.

Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky and Washington currently require medical professionals to get training in HIV testing. To be relevant, this training logically must also cover STI testing, literacy in sexual orientation, gender identity and other critical elements of basic sexual health. A New York legislator has introduced a bill that addresses the source of the problem: the utter lack of a requirement that physicians and nurses in New York understand the nature of sexual orientation, gender identity, the elements of sexual health and how to talk about and encourage STI and HIV testing and promote sexual health literacy. Introduced by Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, this bill would require a course in exactly these essential elements of sexual health common to every New Yorker as a condition of health professional licensing and continuing recertification.

We expect that there will be immense push-back from the same medical and hospital associations that aggressively pushed for legislation to establish near-complete immunity from liability for hospital and nursing home staff during the COVID-19 epidemic. **But we commit to do everything possible to support Assembly Bill A10380A a vital step towards ending sexual health and orientation illiteracy in New York's health care system.**

New York Advocates for Sexual Health - NYASH!

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