

Utah House OKs teaching refusal skills in sex ed curriculum

Bill also would include warnings about pornography's harmful effects

By Marjorie Cortez

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SALT LAKE CITY — The Utah House of Representatives on Thursday passed legislation that revises the state's public school sex education curriculum by including instruction on the harms of pornography and skills to "clearly and expressly" refuse sexual advances.

By a vote of 66-5, the House approved the latest version of HB286, sponsored by Rep. Justin Fawson, R-North Ogden. The bill moves to the Senate for further consideration.

Over the course of a year, 30 diverse groups reviewed Fawson's proposal, he said, among them organizations that are pro-abortion rights, anti-abortion, the ACLU of Utah, Equality Utah as well as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While some groups don't endorse the approach, "they've also expressly said they don't oppose the bill," he said.

"This bill is very appealing to the vast majority of pro-family groups and child advocacy groups. They feel that it is very appropriate to include in our curriculum refusal skills and the harmful effects of pornography. These are very needed in the curriculum today. We have to talk to our kids about these areas," Fawson said.

However, the curriculum is "opt-in" for parents. "I don't think we'll ever move away from that," he said.

The bill also recommends that local school boards review every two years health data on child sexual abuse, teen pregnancies, rates of sexually transmitted infections and disease, and "the number of pornography complaints or other instances reported within the jurisdiction of the local school board."

If HB286 passes, the new subject matter becomes part of the state sex education curriculum. However, school districts and charter schools can adopt the state curriculum or select other instructional materials that comply with State School Board rules.

