XX \_\_, 2024

The Honorable Anna Caballero

Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee

State Capitol, Room 412

Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SB 954 (Menjivar) – Youth Health Equity + Safety Act - Support**

Dear Chair Caballero,

I write on behalf of [insert organization name] to express our strong support for **SB 954 (Menjivar) – The Youth Health Equity + Safety Act**. SB 954 seeks to address the sexually transmitted infection (STI) epidemic among California youth and improve equitable public health outcomes statewide by expanding teen access to condoms in schools and communities.

[Insert organization information]

According to data released by the California Department of Public Health, more than 300,000 Californians were infected with syphilis, chlamydia, or gonorrhea in 2021. Young people, and in particular youth of color, are disproportionately impacted. Statewide data indicate over half of all STIs in the state are experienced among California youth ages 15 – 24 years old. Young people in this age group make up more than 5 out of every 10 chlamydia cases in California, and more than 87% are youth of color. Since most STIs are asymptomatic, they are often left undetected and can pose serious life-threatening health problems later in life including permanent tissue damage, blindness, infertility and cancer related to HPV infections. According to estimates provided by the California STD Control Branch, the state spends approximately $1 billion annually on STIs.

**California youth need and deserve equitable access to condoms to protect their health and safety.**

Condoms are an evidence-based and cost-effective tool to reduce STI transmission, but condom use among sexually active teens has declined over the last decade. The CDC’s Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) shows that in 2021­, an average of 21% of California high school students were sexually active and about half of those students did not use condoms during their last sexual intercourse compared to previous years. Teens have long reported facing multiple barriers to accessing condoms that deter them from seeking and securing the resources they need to protect themselves against STIs and unintended pregnancy. When barriers remain, youth with low-incomes are often left without the option to regularly utilize condoms to help protect their health and prevent an unintended pregnancy from occurring. **Increasing condom accessibility is a safe, low-cost intervention that provides young people with the resources they need while saving state dollars in the short and long-term.**

Some California high schools distribute free condoms to students, including schools in the Los Angeles and San Francisco Unified School Districts, in an effort to curb STI rates and reduce unintended pregnancy. However, not all schools do so, leaving youth in other regions – including regions with some of the highest rates of STIs and pregnancies among youth – without equitable access to condoms and preventive health resources. In 2020, Vermont became the first state in the country to require middle and high schools to make free condoms readily available to students.

In a survey conducted by TeenSource among California teens from December 2023-January 2024, 68 percent of teens indicated they do not have access to condoms in schools and 98 percent of respondents agreed that more sexually active teens would use condoms if they were easier to obtain. Approximately 92 percent of youth said schools should make condoms available.

**To support youth health and wellness, promote health equity and curb STI transmission, SB 954 will:**

* Expand access to condoms by requiring public and charter high schools to make condoms readily available to students for free beginning at the start of the 2025-2026 school year;
* Require said schools to post a notice informing students of where to get condoms on campus and where to find sexual and reproductive health information and resources;
* Bar schools from prohibiting condom distribution in the context of educational and public health programs and initiatives (i.e. during sex education classes taught by community partners, through student peer health programs, campus health fairs, or distributed by school-based health center staff);
* Allow school-based health centers serving students grades 7-12 to make condoms available to students;
* Prohibit pharmacies and retailers from asking for proof of age/identification for condom or contraceptive purchases;

The scope of the STI epidemic requires bold action. To reduce public health disparities and provide greater access to a preventive and cost saving tool we must ensure that California youth have equitable access to condoms. For these reasons, [insert organization name] urges an “aye” vote on SB 954 when the measure comes before the committee.

Sincerely,

Name

Title