



To: Chair Lyons and Members of the Senate Health & Welfare Committee  
From: Breena Holmes, MD, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter;  
Anne Morris, M.D., Vermont Academy of Family Physician; and  
Kimberley Sampson, MD, FACOG, American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology Vermont Chapter  
Rebecca Bell, MD, FAAP, Vermont Medical Society

I write to you this evening to implore you to support S.151, specifically the section that pertains to minor consent to prevention of sexually transmitted infections. Increasing preventive services use for sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV among adolescents is key to decreasing STI and HIV rates among this population in the United States. Youth are disproportionately burdened by these health conditions, particularly among sexual, gender, and racial minorities, and this burden has only worsened over the course of the pandemic.

Half of the nation's STIs are in people ages 15-24, and they can cause lifelong health consequences unless they are tested for and treated.

Adolescents in the US have reported that a significant barrier to seeking sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV services is concern that a guardian will find out.<sup>1</sup> To address this barrier, states have enacted statutes granting minors legal capacity to consent to STI/HIV services without their guardians' involvement.

**Most states allow minors to consent to STI (33) and HIV (35) prevention<sup>2</sup>. All U.S. jurisdictions allow minors to consent independently to STI/HIV testing and treatment (Table).**

Minor consent laws are about safety. They protect teens, families and the community from risk. Without minor consent laws, minors are likely to forego care, spread infections to others, and experience potential lifelong health consequences like infertility. Some minors who need to access care may be victims of sexual abuse by a parent or have parents who are not actively involved in their lives.

Minor consent laws are not designed to circumvent parental involvement. Parents, caregivers, and minors all value parental engagement, and they also recognize the importance of private conversations about sensitive topics. Offering developmentally appropriate confidential care is an important part of helping adolescents grow into responsible adults who can care for their own health.

Multitudes of research have documented the importance of privacy for young people in the adolescent age group...it protects public health, promotes positive health behaviors, avoids negative health outcomes, encourages adolescents to seek needed care, and increases open communication with providers<sup>2</sup>. It also shows that adolescents value confidentiality and are more likely to seek care and provide honest information when confidentiality protections are implemented<sup>4</sup>.

Most youth-serving agencies and medical professionals believe that access to confidential services is essential. Minor consent laws are extremely important," argues Abigail English, director of the Center for Adolescent Health and the Law. "They encourage young people to seek the health care services they need and enable them to talk candidly with their providers."

Vermont has authorized minors to consent to contraceptive services, testing and treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, prenatal care and delivery services, treatment for alcohol and drug abuse, and outpatient mental health care – prevention must be included at the forefront of our efforts to provide evidence-based care.

Please support minor consent to STI prevention as included in S.151.