August 2, 2018

The Honourable Lisa Thompson

Ministry of Education

Mowat Block 22nd Floor

900 Bay Street

Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Thompson,

As an organization committed to women’s safety and gender equality, we are very concerned about the announcement by the Ministry of Education to roll back Ontario’s sexual health education curriculum to 1998 in the upcoming school year.

The current 2015 is a comprehensive sexual health education that is inclusive, rights-based and promotes gender equality has an important role in preventing violence against women. There is a growing evidence base and awareness that curricula including education on consent and healthy relationships will support the prevention of violence against women and advance gender equality. 1 The importance of comprehensive sexual health education is further affirmed across international conventions and human right standards.

1 UNESCO (2009) *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators*. Paris: UNAIDS, UNFPA, Unicef, World Health Organization; GenPol (2017) *Can education stop abuse? Comprehensive Sexuality Education Against Gender-Based Violence*. Cambridge, UK: Gender & Policy Insights CIC; Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (2015) *Sexual Health Education in the Schools: Questions and Answers Updated 2015 Ontario edition*. Toronto, ON: Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN).

Schools are well placed to shift the social norms, attitudes and behaviours that underpin violence against women. To this end, the curriculum must incorporate concepts of gender 2 and power relations and must reflect and respond to the lived realities of young people.

*2 Zonta International believes young people are critical to achieving gender equality and ending violence against women and girls around the world. To truly change the lives of women and girls globally now and for generations to come, we must invest in youth development and educate young leaders for gender equality.*

Violence against women is a critical issue across Canada and we must be looking at our education system to prevent violence against women. Just this month, the Canadian Femicide Conservatory released its mid-year report showing that in 2018 alone, 78 women and girls have died because of femicide in Canada. Forty-one of these women and girls were in Ontario. With such shocking numbers of 2 women and girls dying because of dating and intimate-partner violence, we need to commit to a sex education curriculum that speaks to young people about healthy relationships and deconstructs pervasive and misogynistic gender norms.

With the rise in cyberbullying, the curriculum must cover children’s rights online and explore how children and young people can protect themselves and respect others online. Sexual health education is more than words written on a curriculum document. It is about promoting critical conversations in schools among young people — conversations about gender, sexuality, choice, boundaries and rights. We want the Government of Ontario to send the message that these are vital conversations that must be encouraged and fostered.

Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledonia understand that a consultation is being planned in the near future, and the educators in our club would appreciate being included in your consultative process.

Respectfully,

Margaret Geare

President

Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon

