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**Presentation Outline to Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
Concerning the Proposed Equity Policy, Supporting Guidelines, Sexual
Orientation**

June 2, 2008

By Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Ph.D., FRSC
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I am speaking as a member of the Board of Directors, Health Initiatives for Youth Hamilton, (HIFY), as a resident of Hamilton and public school taxpayer since 1976, as well as in my professional capacity as a scholar.

HIFY supports the Board's Equity Policy-Supporting Guidelines for the following reasons:

At HIFY, we have substantial experience with LGBT (lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual youth)

- we run the Rainbow (LGBT) Youth Support Group weekly
- we established the Rainbow Safety Net, an educational program for service providers to provide safe spaces for LGBT youth and adults
- We acted as facilitators for the establishment of the LGBTQ Community Wellness Centre of Hamilton

These youth are in need of an equitable, supportive, environment in public schools especially free of bullying, harassment, homophobic remarks, and homophobic teasing.

- This is evidenced by their high suicide and attempted suicide rates, and tendency to leave school earlier

- In a very recent survey of 13 LGBT youth at HIFY, when asked to respond to the prompt “We want educators to know,” answers included
 - “I have been jumped so I carry a knife / chain to protect myself.”
 - At school gym is the hardest thing to go through when you’re gay because you get dirty looks, and negative comments. I get called a “Faggot” down the hall regularly.”
 - “There is homophobia everywhere.”

Furthermore:

- 1) The law requires equitable treatment of sexual minorities;
- 2) The Board is a public Board, responsible to the entire public, not only those who represent, or claim to represent, some faith communities in Ontario; public schools are also secular institutions;
- 3) In any case, many faith communities, or their individual members, support equitable and supportive treatment for LGBT people, including youth;

And finally,

I am the author of ***Compassionate Canadians: Civic Leaders Discuss Human Rights*** (University of Toronto Press, 2003); this is a book about the opinions of 78 Hamilton civic leaders on a variety of human rights questions; interviewed 1996-97

- Not a single one of these civic leaders, including those who were very uneasy about gay marriage and gay adoptions, opposed equitable treatment of gays and lesbians in the workplace or the educational system.
- Thus, in my view, the Board reflects the opinions of a significant percentage of Hamiltonians, in instituting a policy of equitable treatment of LGBT people, both as students and as actual or potential employees.