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April 23, 2019

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 4001  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB1586 Opposition

On behalf of our California members, as well as their students, the National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) strongly opposes Assembly Bill 1586, which “would prohibit a pupil in any California private or public school in kindergarten and grades 1 through 12 from performing dissection.” Instead, NABT supports the current *California Education Code*, which respects the expertise of K-12 science educators and allows these professionals to thoughtfully discern whether or not it is appropriate for their students to dissect. The current California policy also includes appropriate provisions for students to opt out of a dissection experience, promoting self-advocacy and conversation between student and teacher.

The engagement of students in a well-crafted dissection creates a total experience that removes abstraction as students learn about structure, function, adaptation, and diversity among organisms. They are able to observe the similarities and differences among organs from the same species as well as gain an awe-inspiring appreciation for their own bodies. The use of animal products in the life science classroom is also not limited to traditional dissection specimens. Biomaterials from food production, and food-quality items like chicken wings and fish filets, are used for a number of investigations that promote science practices as outlined in the California Science Standards.

While the increased quality and accessibility of dissection alternatives has helped address concerns from students and parents opposed to dissection, these alternatives are not without limitations. Although models and digital modalities may teach the same concepts, they rarely have the same impact. A key finding from a 2014 paper published in *Advances of Physiology Education* captures what thousands of biology teachers have confirmed in their own classrooms:

*“When asked which type of instruction they would like to see added to the course curriculum, students requested organ dissections more often than any other treatment. Furthermore, students who performed organ dissections generally had more favorable opinions of science.” (Lombardi SA, Hicks RE, Thompson KV, Marbach-Ad G. Adv Physiol Educ 38: 80 – 86, 2014)*

NABT maintains that the professional biology educator is responsible for designing meaningful learning experiences that promote positive attitudes toward science, help students better identify as scientists, and protect those students who refrain from dissection. The state’s *Education Code* does this, while AB1586 as written presumes that dissection has a negative impact on student learning and effectively eliminates both teacher and student agency.

The proper and ethical use of animals in science classrooms must always be matched to the explicit standards and objectives for the course and contribute to the educational outcomes for students. Ultimately, it is the professional educator in the classroom who is in the best position to make the determination about using non-living animals for dissection.

NABT urges California to maintain education policies that respects professional educators and allows students the opportunity to learn both the processes and practices of science via dissection should they so choose. We encourage you to vote NO on AB1586.

Sincerely,

Sherry Annee  
President, NABT