

2 back bill to give gay lessons 'opt-out'

Urge parents to lend support

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Staten Island City Councilman John A. Fusco and Community School Board member Jerry Cammarata are urging parents to press state lawmakers to make lessons on respecting homosexuals optional.

At a press conference scheduled to be held today at City Hall, the Island elected officials were expected to hail a bill introduced by State Sen. Serphin Maltese (R-Queens) that allows parents to "excuse their child from areas of study which conflict with the religion of the parents or guardian."

Those areas of study would include "societal concerns, social awareness, personal relations and

interactions or living arrangements which conflict with the religion of the parents or guardian."

The bill will go before the Education committees of the Assembly and the Senate.

"It's important to have an opt-out to allow parents the moral and values control over their children," said Cammarata. An "opt-out law" would also apply to lessons on HIV/AIDS, Cammarata said.

Lessons on respecting gays and lesbians, which first appeared in a first-grade curriculum, have raised the ire of parents throughout the city.

The Island school board transferred the lesson from "Children of the Rainbow" to the sixth grade in Family Living/Sex Education classes, from which parents can exempt their children. Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez ruled that the lessons are required

and cannot be made optional. The school board plans to defy the chancellor.

In December, Fusco introduced a resolution to the City Council urging the state Assembly to pass an "opt-out" provision. The measure is still in committee.

"It's a message to the state to take heed and do this. The Staten Island school board and the board in Queens have refused to go along with it," Fusco said of the curriculum.

Cammarata said he has spoken to several organization leaders who are prepared to press their representatives to pass the bill.

"They will notify all the members of their organizations of the pending bill," he said. Cammarata said he hopes to mobilize between 50,000 and 100,000 people.

Cammarata said he was "not at liberty to say" which groups have agreed to lobby on behalf of the bill.