

May 1, 2007

Honorable Mayor Adrian Fenty  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Fenty,

As organizations concerned about the health of our District's youth we would like to thank you for your continued commitment to ending the HIV epidemic in our community. As you stated recently, it is the most important health issue currently facing our city.

As you are well aware, there is abundant scientific literature supporting the effectiveness of medically accurate, age-appropriate HIV and comprehensive sex education that is based in teaching abstinence but also provides young people with the information and skills they need to protect themselves from HIV infection. Opposite this, abstinence-only education programs are incomplete, ineffective, and their presence in DC's schools may be fueling the HIV epidemic in our city.

The District government currently receives \$142,000 in federal funding for abstinence-only programs under Title V, Section 510 (b) of the Social Security Act. We are asking you to reject this funding stream because:

- It applies to "youth" ages 12 to 29. Given that over 90% of people ages 20 to 29 have had sexual intercourse, these young adults need programs that address the realities of their lives and provide them with the information they need to prevent STDs, including HIV/AIDS, and unintended pregnancies;
- The program funding requires a local match of District tax dollars which adds an extra burden for ill-advised programming;
- The programs are restricted from giving medically accurate information about contraception and condoms – even for 20 to 29 year olds; and

You've publicly stated your concerns regarding the abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and your instincts are in line with every public health institution in our country including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Society of Adolescent Medicine, American Public Health Association, and the American Medical Association. In addition, all evidence suggests that comprehensive sex education is a mainstream American value with support from a vast majority of Americans.

All groups providing HIV education share the belief that abstinence is the most effective method for preventing the spread of HIV. But effective programs also provide young people with additional information and skills they need to protect themselves from HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies. Without this information, any HIV and health education program is incomplete.

Published reviews of the curricula used by groups teaching abstinence-only education and promoting abstinence until marriage show that they often provide erroneous information about condoms and disease transmission. Strategies used by these groups include using 'virginity' or 'purity' pledges – promises to remain abstinent until marriage. Evaluations of these programs show that they have the unexpected consequence of actually deterring contraceptive use among youth once they begin sexual activity and increase their risk of unintended pregnancy and STD infection. Additionally, the key component of abstinence-only education which encourages abstinence from sex outside of marriage sends a mixed message to children of divorced or single-parent households and youth who are suffering sexual abuse, in addition to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender young people.

Given the ineffectiveness of abstinence-only programs we, the undersigned, are asking you to ensure that any health education in DC Public Schools is based on comprehensive sex education principles and that you reject the \$142,000 that Washington, DC currently receives in federal funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Attached you will find a list of other jurisdictions who have rejected Title V funding. A few weeks back, Wisconsin joined seven other states by rejecting this federal funding stream and there are a growing number of other states and cities unlikely to apply for these funds in the coming fiscal year. We request DC to follow their example.

Obviously, our city must focus on results. Science, not ideology, should drive public health interventions and consequently, an abstinence-only approach is poor health policy for the District's schools. We ask that you recognize the importance of a medically-accurate comprehensive sex education that will help to ensure that our young people are healthy, safe, and thriving.

Sincerely,

Burgess Clinic, Children's National Medical Center  
Campaign to End AIDS DC  
Children's National Medical Center  
City Year Washington, DC  
DC Assembly on School Health Care  
DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy  
DC Fights Back!  
DC Primary Care Association  
DC Psychological Association  
District of Columbia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
The Gerasene Group  
Girls Incorporated of the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area  
Healthy Generations Program, Children's National Medical Center  
Latin American Youth Center  
Legal Momentum  
Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care  
Metropolitan Washington Public Health Association  
Metro TeenAIDS  
Next Step Public Charter School  
Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health  
The Urban Alliance Foundation, Inc.  
Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, DC  
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice  
Regional Addiction Prevention (RAP), Inc.  
Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc.  
Youth Action Research Group  
Young Women's Project

Attached:

1) Policy statement endorsements of comprehensive sex education

Society for Adolescent Medicine

*Position paper on Abstinence-only education policies and programs*

[http://www.adolescenthealth.org/PositionPaper\\_Abstinence\\_only\\_edu\\_policies\\_and\\_programs.pdf](http://www.adolescenthealth.org/PositionPaper_Abstinence_only_edu_policies_and_programs.pdf)

*Position paper on HIV/AIDS infection and AIDS in adolescents*

[http://www.adolescenthealth.org/PositionPaper\\_HIV\\_Infection\\_and\\_AIDS\\_in\\_Adolescents-update.pdf](http://www.adolescenthealth.org/PositionPaper_HIV_Infection_and_AIDS_in_Adolescents-update.pdf)

American Medical Association

*H-170.968 Sexuality Education, Abstinence, and Distribution of Condoms in Schools*

[http://www.ama-assn.org/apps/pf\\_new/pf\\_online?fn=resultLink&doc=policyfiles/HnE/H-170.968.HTM&st=sexuality&catg=AMA/HnE&catg=AMA/BnGnC&catg=AMA/DIR&&nth=1&st\\_p=0&nth=1&](http://www.ama-assn.org/apps/pf_new/pf_online?fn=resultLink&doc=policyfiles/HnE/H-170.968.HTM&st=sexuality&catg=AMA/HnE&catg=AMA/BnGnC&catg=AMA/DIR&&nth=1&st_p=0&nth=1&)

American Public Health Association

*Sexuality Education As Part Of A Comprehensive Health Education Program in K-12 Schools*

<http://www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/policysearch/default.htm?id=1304>

*Abstinence and U.S. Abstinence-Only Education Policies: Ethical and Human Rights Concerns*

<http://www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/policysearch/default.htm?id=1334>

American Academy of Pediatrics

*Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents*

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;108/2/498>

American Psychological Association

*APA Press Release: Based on the research, comprehensive sex education is more effective at stopping the spread of HIV infection: Research Shows That Abstinence-Only Programs Have Limited Effectiveness And Unintended Consequences*

<http://www.apa.org/releases/sexeducation.html>

2) Information on Federal Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

*A Brief History of Federal Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding*

<http://www.siecus.org/policy/states/2005/Explanation.pdf>

3) List of jurisdictions that have rejected federal funding for abstinence-only programs under Title V, Section 510 (b) of the Social Security Act.

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