

**Testimony to the Committee on Health and Human Services
For the Budget Oversight Hearing on the Department of Health**

**Abigail Koerner
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Good Morning Chairwoman Alexander and other Committee members. My name is Abigail Koerner, I am 16 years old and a Junior at Wilson High School. I've lived and gone to school in ward 3 for my whole life. I am a Peer Advocate at The Young Women's Project and have worked for the program for almost two years now. During this time, I have discovered my passion for advocacy work and the importance of sexual health. I hope to go into public policy, public health, or law later in life.

All YWP employees begin their peer education journey as, "peer educators" who can give out condoms and provide information to students at school. Later, employees can be promoted to be "Peer Trainers" who can train other YWP youth to become peer educators. "Peer Advocates" are advanced YWP employees and are able to pass out condoms, train other youth, and advocacy work for a variety of issues, including the youth vote in DC. These positions require time and commitment. And like every other job, compensation is necessary for good quality work.

At YWP we train new peer educators. This peer-to-peer training is crucial; new peer educators can relate more to other teens who have more experience doing the same work. It is empowering to know that as a youth, I not only have a job and skills, I am able to teach other teens my age the same job and skills. Our network of peer educators spans across 15 schools where youth are able to provide on-the-go education to their classmates. This year alone, we have trained 207 new peer educators. This means 207 youth are available to their peers for condoms, advice, referrals to clinics, and correct information.

Our trainings include detailed information about the menstrual cycle, STI Prevention, Birth Control Options, male and female condoms, Pregnancy Options and other sexual health topics. Our supervisors also often invite guest speakers to speak with us about life skills like managing finances. YWP gives trained youth the opportunity to learn about sexual health so we can receive and share information with our peers that is not attainable from a half-year health course.

YWP does not only train youth, we have also recently engaged with DCPS health teachers to ensure that they teach health in a way that their students will understand and remember. Our most recent professional development day

appearance was on February 12 at HD Woodson. We used the same presentation tactics that we do with youth so the adults could experience sexual health education the way we hope their students will.

I love being a peer educator. Teens all around me are sexually active and I am glad to be able to provide everyone with the information they need to be safe and mindful when having sex. My peers now know me as more than just a friend, but as a valuable and trusted resource. Most teenagers are sexually active and it is important to have peer educators like me to intervene before risky behavior occurs. For these reasons, I ask that you please allocate \$190,595 to Peer Educator stipends in the Department of Health budget.