

**Testimony to the Committee on Health for the
Public Oversight Roundtable on Youth Perspectives of District Health Programs
Testimony on Teen Pregnancy and Comprehensive Sexual Health Education**

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Good afternoon council member Catania and committee, my name is Denise Hicks and I am a 17 year old senior at Booker T. Washington Public Charter School. I work with the PHASE Team as a trainer for The Young Women's Project. I am devoting my time because I want to make a difference in our community, even if the impact is small and I want to start by preventing teenage pregnancies.

This testimony is about why Comprehensive Sexuality Education is important as we try to decrease the rate of teen pregnancies. Recent statistics state:

- In DC, for every 1,000 young women there are 165 pregnancies and for every 1,000 young women 50 teen births.
- Nationally, for every 1,000 young women, there are 70 pregnancies and 43 teen births, all between the ages of 15-19

As you can see, our rates are over two times higher than the national average. This presents a grim picture for the lives of young women in the District who may be sexually active. This doesn't have to be their reality, when we have the right tools to ensure that we as young women have the knowledge we need to make healthier decisions. Comprehensive sexuality education is the key to behavior change; when we have the right information, we are better able to evaluate our different options before we act.

School is a place for education so why isn't sexual education being taught there? DCMR 2305 (which is cited by national organizations as a model law) calls for "regular curriculum instruction ...that includes information on human anatomy, physical changes during adolescence, menstruation, intercourse, pregnancy, child birth, lactation, venereal disease, contraception, abortion, homosexuality, reduction of infant mortality, impertinent of pregnancy outcomes, and awareness and prevention of rape and other sexual offences, personal decision making in parenting and sexuality." This law, passed in 1979, is not being implemented.

We, as trainers at YWP try to prevent more teen pregnancies by introducing contraception methods. Over the summer, I held training for the Latin American Youth Center Upward Bound program where a pregnant teen stated, "If I had known that five months ago, I wouldn't be in this situation." This illustrates that youth need this information;



that particular young woman felt as though the information I was able to share could have changed her life. How many other young people might feel the same way if we begin to implement DCMR 2305?

The Youth Framework recommends that we. *“Expand sexual health curricula beyond reproductive health and STI awareness; Utilize innovative and nontraditional methods to educate students about sexual health; Develop interactive classroom curricula focused on issues related to youth sexual health; Integrate social determinants into sexual health curricula and engage youth in the planning for the sexual health curriculum.”* We agree with all of this.

Help us make it happen. With your leadership, we would like to establish sex education in as many schools as possible. It is imperative that the teachers are trained and even have some students trained as well as able to distribute condoms. I’m here today because I not only care but I was one of those teen parents. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak.