

**Testimony to the Committee on Health
For the Public Oversight Roundtable on Youth Perspectives of District Health Programs
Recommendations for HAHSTA's Youth Condom Distribution Programs**

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Hello! My name is Derrica Vine. I am 16 years old, and a junior at Woodrow Wilson SHS. I am a part of the youth-staff at the Young Women's project under the PHASE-Peer Health and Sexuality Education campaign. I was a part of the Youth Health Assessment team. As a part of the Youth Health Assessment team I went around and assessed the different programs in the community. I am here to talk about condom distribution.

Washington, DC has been noted by national organizations for its high rate of condom use amongst youth; with innovative policies like the condom availability policy in DCPS, young people can access the vital protection that they need to stay safe. Even though we have progressive policies, I am here to testify that our implementation of these policies is not up to par. Despite the fact that our policies spawn creative programming, lack of strong oversight and evaluation prevents initiatives from being effective. During my work with the Youth Health Assessment Team this summer, I learned about two potentially great programs -- Wrap MC and Real Talk. One of my other colleagues, Avery Ross, will share a bit about Real Talk, but I am going to share my perspective on Wrap MC.

HAHSTA, in conjunction with DCPS and OSSE, developed Wrap MC as a way to promote condom use among youth by allowing trained staff members, in addition to the school nurse, to distribute condoms in schools. In the Fiscal Year 2010 Committee on Health HASTA Oversight Report, it is written that ,

"In FY 2010, DCPS issued a directive to high school principals to designate a Wrap M.C. coordinator and two additional adult staff to be Wrap M.C.s... To date, 17 DCPS high schools, 12 public charter schools and 18 community-based organizations have designated Wrap M.C.'s. In total, 180 people have been certified by HAHSTA." (Question 32, page 47)

Furthermore, HAHSTA also reported 200,000 out of 4 million male condoms were distributed to youth in that same fiscal year. The number of condoms distributed to youth specifically through the Wrap MC program is unknown, so after hearing about the program, I began to wonder about how it works.

With the high rates of STI's and teen pregnancies in DC, having condoms available in schools is a great strategy for improving youth sexual health. I feel that condom distribution programs allow teens to have greater access to contraception and promote making healthy decisions. Moreover, Wrap MC is a great program in theory because it provides teens with multiple sources to obtain condoms. However, when I wanted to learn more about it, I was faced with a number of barriers. I went on the internet to get information and all I saw was a blog which made me question its credibility. While going through the blog I saw several posts that were irrelevant to what I was trying to find. After finally getting to what I wanted, I learned that despite the law stating that the youth could distribute condoms, the WRAP-MC program did not allow youth to get certified to distribute condoms. I believe that

the youth would feel more comfortable getting condoms from their peers instead of adults. Many of us don't even know who the WRAP-MC person or persons at our schools are. Youth voices are often missing from the discussion leading to missed opportunities for youth involvement, insufficient marketing and advertising efforts for health promotion, and underutilized resources (like WRAP MC).

To gather more information about the program and understand why students don't know about their WRAP MCs, the YWP did an informal assessment of the program. They called 15 DC public high schools to learn more about how their WRAP MC programs were being implemented of those; only 10 of those schools responded to these calls. Four out of the ten schools were able to confirm that the program had been implemented in their schools, while the rest of the people they were able to reach had not heard of it. (The majority of people that they reached out to were school nurses). Of those that responded, none were able to provide information about how they advertise the program to students or give information about how many condoms they were distributing. This illustrates that if the adults are only able to share little information and/or insights about the program, then the students are definitely unaware of this resource.

The WRAP MC program has the potential to be a really powerful resource for teens. Currently, we are not doing enough to promote the program to students, nor are we doing enough to ensure that condoms being distributed to schools are actually getting into the hands of the youth. Many studies including one done overseas by USAID have found that peer educator programs that allow teens to distribute condoms lead to safer sex practices among the educators and the peers they counsel.¹ By creating more opportunities to promote the program through youth involvement, the program can better meet the needs of teens. Teens should have access to information regarding the WRAP MC programs at their schools. The fact that so many adults within our schools do not know about the program indicates that an even greater number of students do not know about the program. We can fix this by allowing teens to become WRAP MC representatives who can either distribute condoms themselves and/or actively advertise the program to their schoolmates. We cannot continue to squander opportunities to promote healthy behaviors.

Councilmember Catania, I am asking you to encourage change in the Wrap MC program. The vision is there, but our execution is dismal. We need you and the other members of the Committee to see that quality policies like the Condom Availability Policy are enforced. HAHSTA has the right idea, but they are getting the wrong results. WRAP MC is a great tool, and it should be improved. It is an opportunity for teens and adult staffs working in schools to come together and strengthen a great initiative. Thank you for your time.

The youth can't get help from these programs if they don't know that they exist. Two potentially great programs that I learned about are Wrap MC and Real Talk. When trying to find out more about the Wrap MC program I was faced with a number of barriers. I went on the internet to get information and all I saw was a blog which made me

¹ Peer Educators Can Promote Safer Sex Behaviors- Zambia Youth Reproductive Health OR Summary 17:
http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNACY879.pdf

question its credibility. While going through the blog I saw several posts that were irrelevant to what I was trying to find. After finally getting to what I wanted, I learned that despite the law stating that the youth could distribute condoms, the WRAP-MC program did not allow youth to get certified to distribute condoms. I believe that the youth would feel more comfortable getting condoms from their peers instead of adults. Many of us don't even know who the WRAP-MC person or persons at our schools are. With real talk the idea and program is great, however when you text the number real talk provides the names of clinics but not the address. This is another barrier for the youth they would still have to find out where the programs are located. Youth voices are often missing from the discussion leading to missed opportunities for youth involvement, insufficient marketing and advertising efforts for health promotion, and underutilized resources (like WRAP MC,).

When one WRAP-MC representative at my school was asked how many condoms distributed he said, "It's of no concern." I'm really concerned.