

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

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Hello Chairwoman Alexander and other Committee members. My name is Jade Abney, I am in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA), and I live in ward 8. I have 2 brothers and 1 sister. My mother was 15 when she had me, which is why I want to be a Child Advocate when I get older. I just became a Peer Educator at The Young Women's Project and I absolutely love my job.

Sexual Health Education at my school is okay, but it can be improved. They talk about the basics: sex, anatomy and how the female and male body works. They talk about safe sex, but they don't talk about what you need to do to have safe sex. They don't say where you can access resources. Even though they told me how condoms protect against pregnancy and STIs, they never told me how to use a condom.

In sexual health class, every student has the opportunity to take a baby home – you either get one baby or twins. The babies actually cry. They wake you up in the middle night showing you how hard it is to take care of a baby. This activity really showed the importance of using condoms or staying abstinent.

At home, I was very fortunate and received a good sexual health education. The information my guardians gave me about sex was good because they told me about everything I can catch. They told me about the consequences of having a child and what I can do if I do get pregnant. They told me about sex in general. They told me it feels good, but safe sex is the best thing to do. My parents and grandparents had kids at a very young age while in high school, so they talk about safe sex or sex a lot.

At my school, Peer Educators are very important. A lot of kids come up to ask for condoms: at least 25 kids a day for me. They are scared asking their parents for condoms or about sex. The nurse gives condoms, but she is mean so nobody goes to her. The youth who wanted condoms before this program were not getting the condoms they needed and anything can happen if you are not protected. Students need someone they can talk to, and being in the same age range I can relate to them about certain questions or stories. They feel comfortable with me and that makes me feel good because I am helping them stay protected and I am educating them about safe sex, which is needed in a lot of schools today.

Peer Educators should get paid for our work because this is a job. It makes us feel good to have a job that helps other people learn about safe sex and the consequences of unprotected sex. Even giving out condoms saves people from getting STIs and pregnancy. The Young Women's Project creates job opportunities where there are typically

none. It is not easy for youth to get jobs, especially in Ward 7 or 8, because most of the jobs that are available are Uptown. In addition, at TMA, we have a lot of homework and this job is mostly done during school. It allows me to still concentrate on your school work while learning how to be professional.

Thank you for taking your time to hear my testimony and the reasons why it is important to for DOH to continue allocating the money for our stipends.