

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

**James Peters  
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Hello Council Member Alexander and other Committee members. My name is James Peters and I attend Roosevelt High School, I testified before you at the Department of Health Performance Oversight Hearing on March 7th this year. I am currently one of 36 Peer Educators at the Young Women's Project (YWP). I distribute condoms in my school and talk to students about sex education, proper condom use, STIs, STI prevention, contraception and many more topics. YWP's peer educator program is working in conjunction with the Wrap-MC program, sponsored by HAHSTA and DCPS to implement the Youth Pilot program. I want to thank Principal Mitchell, Ms. Eichelberger and Mr. Testa at Roosevelt for supporting my work. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

YWP is a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of young women so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth. YWP's peer educator program is working in conjunction with the Wrap-MC program at HAHSTA (HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STDs and Tuberculosis Administration) to implement the Wrap-MC Youth Pilot program at six schools (Cardozo, Coolidge, Bell, Dunbar, Roosevelt, Wilson). We have 36 peer educators on the ground distributing condoms and information every day. HAHSTA provides the condoms; we recruit and train the youth staff, supervise their work, and pay them a stipend of \$7.25 an hour for up to 4 hours a week. Since October, these educators have distributed close to 6000 external and internal condoms and educated 2000 youth.

I am here to testify about the Department of Health (DOH) Budget. Our suggestion is to put \$100,000 in the DOH budget to fund 108 peer educators in 41 DCPS and Charter High Schools. The peer educators would work 4 hours a week during the school year to educate youth and distribute condoms. We are asking that this money go directly to the youth educators in the form of stipends. Once they qualify, they would register with DOES (like the summer youth employment program) and then receive a monthly payment on their EBT card. We have requested this funding from HAHSTA, who we work closely with on the Wrap MC program. However, we have not received a funding commitment yet. There are four reasons we need this money and this program.

Youth have a special role to play in health education. There is a certain level of comfort between us and our peers. Youth are more hesitant to talk to adults. For example, I've been doing classroom presentations at Roosevelt, and I bring condoms, but the teachers are there, so no one wants to take the condoms. Everyone is looking at them, but no one took them except for one girl. But when I hand out condoms at lunch, everyone wants them. A lot of education also happens in lunch conversations. When everyone is finished eating, I ask people what they need. I pass out the most condoms on a bus ride to

my cooking class, this is because everyone is more relaxed and having fun. Since they know that what they share is confidential, they feel more at home and can relate more with us.

I am on the Health Standard team at YWP. We research about different topics. I am doing research on substance abuse, mental health, and stability. We are making questions for a survey to gather information about what experience teens are having and their experiences with substance abuse. That is important. For me, I feel as though it's about teaching teens to help each other. We should have a say in what we are taught. We have friends who have mental issues or using drugs. We need resources so that we can help them. Without youth involvement – there would be no progress. Without our help, you will not be able to get help to teens who need it.

Youth need opportunities to prepare for having jobs. This job, as a peer educator, at YWP taught me how to be professional. This is my first job, I learned about keeping track of my hours, signing in and out, working with adults, how to write a professional email, how to keep a to-do list, how to interact with people, and more. We learn how to separate business from personal- this is important. We need to know how to get things done. If I got a regular job, without this one first, I might not know everything that is needed. We need time to practice and learn how to be at work, and this job provides that. It teaches something that is not taught that often in school, or at all.

We need more peer educators. By creating a fund for youth stipends, we could recruit youth from all schools and expand the number of peer educators at each school. At Roosevelt, I am the only peer educator working. I would like to see more Wrap MCs -- 20 from each school. Peer educators are expanding the reach of health education and involving more students in sexual health education. We are making youth interested in this subject. More and more people ask me about our work every day, and they want to work with us. I believe that money is one thing that shows that we are equal to adults. We need money for different stuff, like savings, clothing, or helping our families. A lot of young people have to contribute to family expenses, something that I have had to do too.

Thank you for listening to my testimony I hope that you understand our points and take them into consideration and keep funding this wonderful program. Thank you.