

**Testimony to the Committee on Health and Human Services
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 am a senior at Columbia Heights Education Campus (CHEC). I am here as a peer advocate at the Young Women's Project, where I worked for three years. I work in the Peer Health and Sexuality Education campaign, a youth-adult partnership that works to improve DC teens' reproductive health by expanding comprehensive sexuality education, ensuring access to community based services, and engaging teen women and men as peer educators and decision-makers. As a peer advocate, I am a leader in my school.

Today, I am here to talk about the Youth Health Educator Program, the impact we are having on DC youth, and why it's important to continue our funding. This 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 program at 18 schools (Anacostia, Eastern, CHEC, Woodson, Cardozo, Coolidge, CHEC, Dunbar, Roosevelt, Wilson, School Without Walls, Luke C. Moore, McKinley Tech, Thurgood Marshall, Friendship Collegiate, Maya Angelou, and National Collegiate).

Last year, I testified before the Committee on Health about the need for funding for peer educator stipends. We are very grateful to you, Councilmember Alexander, for allocating \$157,000 in the DOH budget to support this program. Which has been paying the wages of 207 peer educators throughout the city. YWP has a contract with DOH for this work, with 3 years left. But without the official allocation of the money, this contract is not guaranteed. Continuation of the contract would require an additional \$190,595 for next year. With this money, next year, we will employ 300 youth throughout the city who will work in the most at-risk schools to enrich their communities with valuable information and resources regarding healthy sexual activity.

With your support, we have been able to accomplish a lot this past year. We hired 207 new peer educators; 45 percent of them are from wards 7 and 8. Together, we worked to lower the STI and pregnancy rates in DC high schools. Since October, we collectively:

- Distributed 64,247 male condoms, 3,346 female condoms, 9,104 flavored condoms, 5,430 lubricant packets, and 850 dental dams to 21,356 students.
- Made 927 Clinic Referrals
- Conducted 21,356 educational interventions

Imagine how high our teen pregnancy and STI rates would be if DC youth never received the 76,697 condoms we distributed and never used them. There goes all that progress with falling teen pregnancy rates.

It is important for peer educators to be in the schools because we fill the cracks in sexual health education. We are able to teach our peers about sexual health in an informative and interesting way and provide condoms and clinic referrals especially to the school-based health centers. A lot of youth don't know they exist. We started collecting data from students about whether they know about school-based clinics and what they use them for. So far about half of youth didn't know that they exist in their schools. It is important that students get information and condoms because these things because they are necessary for sexually active students to stay safe. If students start practicing good sexual habits early, it will help them in adult life. Many students are fascinated by these materials because they had never seen them before.

Many of my peers do not know the benefits of condoms and thus do not use them. That's why they need to learn the truth and that is why this program is so important. People always say they only want magnums, of course. When we pass out condoms that is help lowing the STI rates in our community considering young people have the highest rates. Having access to the condoms allows teens to stay safe.

Thank you for listening to my testimony. I hope that you can allocate \$190,595 in the DOH budget, so that peer educators can work to continue to provide teens what they need to stay safe. We will make sure that this investment continues to go a long, long way.