



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

**Jennifer Marquez
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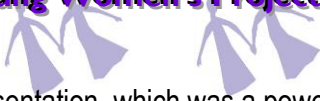
Hello Councilmember Catania my name is Jennifer Marquez. I am 15 years old and a freshman at Banneker High School. I have come here today as a representative of The Young Women's Project and as a teen born and raised in Washington D.C

I am here today because I am concerned about the high rates of teen pregnancy, STIs, and HIV/AIDS. I am also concerned about the lack of youth involvement in addressing these issues. Sex is not the main topic in my school and I have never seen any teen moms there either. I believe and know that many people in my school are sexually active but then again they are most likely taking many precautions. I say this because in my school the main goal is going to college and having a successful future. But it's still very important for us to have information about reproductive health and for youth to be involved in educating other youth. Many teens have great ideas and can help with these problems and here are my recommendations for how youth could be involved in reducing teen pregnancy and STIs:

One is including reproductive health as part of community service: Health **should** count as community service. We have a big focus on community service in our school but we don't include health. Health is part of the community and if you have knowledge and experience then you should spread it around to help other teens. I would like to see a mandatory after school program on health.

I would also suggest expanding health classes: We need more space for health in our school curricula and to get some health education each year. Only 9th and 10th graders get health classes for one semester. What happens when you are in 11th and 12th? As you get older you get older you still need that information and you are most likely open to more sexual activities. I enjoy the focus on education in our school but if you don't know how to take care of your health then you are not going to get very far.

Also I would include presentations by youth in health class and during STI testing: Youth viewpoints are the key to helping youth. My friend and I did not get tested and so we were not allowed to see the



presentation, which was a power point from adults. If there were teens who are experts on the issues making presentations maybe it will make a difference. We had a senior who came into our classroom to talk about sexual health and did a rap and that's one part of the class I remembered the most.

Lastly making condoms more available in the school would play a huge role. At our school, you have to go to the nurse's office to get condoms and that's it. I heard at School Without Walls they have baskets everywhere. Having more places to get condoms in school would help and if students could distribute condoms more maybe people would be more open to using them.

Thank you for listening to my ideas.