

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

**Monique Garey
Peer Health and Sexual Education Staff, Young Women's Project**

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Hello Councilmember Alexander and other Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Monique Garey. I am a senior at Dunbar high school. I'm interested in music, and I hope to go into broadcast journalism one day. As a peer educator with the Young Women's Project (YWP), I am trained on sex education, peer pressure and healthy relationships, and how to teach these topics at school to my peers. I am also a youth staff member at the PHASE program (Peer Health and Sexuality Education) which works to improve DC teens' reproductive health by expanding comprehensive sexuality education, ensuring access to community and school based reproductive health care, and engaging teen women and men as peer educators and decision makers.

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). YWP is implementing 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 would like to thank Coach Jones for being supportive of this project at Dunbar.

I am here today to ask the Committee to show support for this work – and the peer educators that actually do it – by allocating \$100,000 from the Department of Health budget to fund the stipends of 108 peer educator positions in 21 DCPS schools and 20 charter schools. Like us, these educators would be managed by community based organizations, trained in sexual health education, and would work 16 hours a month in their schools to educate youth, and distribute condoms. They would be paid a stipend of \$7.25 an hour. We have requested this allocation directly from the leadership at HAHSTA, who we work closely with on the Wrap MC program. However, we have not received a funding commitment yet. We need to pay peer educators for these four reasons:

First, peer educators are everywhere adults can't be. There is the education that happens in the classroom – and the education that happens everywhere else in the school. Youth are in the lunch room, in the hallways, walking at home from school, on a sports team during practice, in the locker room, and at social events. This is where the real discussions about sex and relationships happen. Peer educators are there in real time with real talk. We are having real conversations about life events and what to do. Once I've learned the correct information about sex, I am comfortable telling my peers about what to do and to help them separate the facts from the myths. When someone like a peer educator is not there, youth are more vulnerable to make wrong decisions.

Second, youth are making important contributions to health education and they deserve to be recognized and compensated – just like adults. This work deserves to be paid because we are working hard and effecting change. We are doing all this work because we noticed that health education was not working in our schools. If YWP did not exist, the Wrap MC program would not be as strong; the kids would not get as much information. In four months we educated 2,000 youth and distributed 6,000 condoms. Youth can take other important roles too. Another project I am working on at YWP is helping to revise the Health Standards. Our team doing is research on different areas

of health. I am working on social health--relationships, parent and children, peers, violence, bullying, and other issues. We are doing internet research, reading reports and collecting statistics. We are also putting together a survey for students so that we know what health issues they are experiencing. We will be working with adults later on in the year to make recommendations about the standards. It is important for us to be at the table. We should have a say in what students coming up behind us should learn rather than what they are learning now. Times change. Situations are different and they should be reflected in our health class. Cyber bullying is really big on social media. That is not in the standards. Most adults never experienced that. Social media did not even exist 20 years ago. There is also exposing yourself. Exposing others. Harassment. We experienced these things they need to be reflected in the health standards.

Third, youth need money. I do this work because I want to educate my peers on things they will need in the future. There are things we are learning now, decisions we will make, that will affect us into adulthood. **I enjoy doing this work no matter what, but I still really need the money because it costs money to graduate. They say your education is free, but it's really not. My senior dues are \$300, and that is not even including prom (with is \$85 for a ticket and \$300 more for dress and shoes). You can't afford any of this if you don't have a job. These are the things everyone says that you should look forward to, but we won't even be able to afford them.**

Lastly, youth need to get ready for the workforce. For me, this job gave me more responsibility than I've had before. I had to get better at multitasking, which will be an important skill in future jobs. We have to do research, work with teachers, get permission from administrators, and do a lot of public speaking. Since, I want to go into broadcast journalism , I will have to talk a lot and present information.

In conclusion, I would like to say thank you for this opportunity and I hope you understand how valuable this program is.