

**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 Romha Assefa, I am in the 10th grade at Cardozo High School, and I live in Ward 1. I just became a Peer Educator at The Young Women's Project (YWP). I plan to attend Virginia Tech in order to become an engineer. Today, I am going to talk about my job at YWP and why jobs like this one are important for teens in DC.

YWP staff came to my school and told us about their peer educator program and that they were hiring. I like helping people so I knew this job was a great fit for me. Programs like this are very helpful. Many people my age do not know about sex. This job educates us so that we can educate them so that they know what they are doing. We give out condoms and information about how to prevent pregnancy and STIs and where to go for testing and other services. I think every school work with a program like organization because the earlier we educate ourselves the better.

Trained peer educators, like me, can help students learn the information they need to know to make good decisions. I think it is very important to pay youth who are doing this kind of work because people my age need money too. Trying to get a job in DC as a teen is really hard because people want you to work for a whole day, and as a student I can't because I am in school. I used to have one job but the employer said he couldn't keep me because he needed an employee that can work full time.

We also lack professionalism and experience because we are still young and have not gained experience at all. Having a job can help us prepare for the future. We can gain the experience we will need in future working places.

Teens need money to have fun and go out, but also every family is different. Some teens have to support themselves and family members. I have to buy my own food and other things that I may want. I also help my father out to pay bills, and without this job I wouldn't have the opportunity to do that.

I also believe that having a job keeps us out of trouble. It keeps us occupied, so if one of our friends wants us to do something we know that we have responsibilities.

I feel like many of the kids at my schools don't stay with programs very long. Having a program that pays youth will help youth stay. Having focus groups and real life conversations also engages teens. One time our school facilitated a meeting for young men at our school. It was an open conversation with older men from the community. This conversation helped me to not make the same mistakes they made. Programs like this and The Young Women's Project help students think about the decisions that they're making and will help them become more responsible.

For these reasons, I think that DOH should continue to provide funding for peer educator stipends.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.