

**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 Abigail Koerner, I am a sophomore at Woodrow Wilson High School and a Peer Educator at The Young Women's Project. I work at my school to distribute condoms and educate my peers about healthy sexual activity. I am one of 50 peer educators working at YWP. Currently, we are at 6 schools, but next year we will be expanding to 12 schools. On March 11th of this year, I testified before you at the Department of Health Performance Oversight Hearing. I am here today to talk about our need for the continuation of the funding of peer education stipends for youth throughout the city. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

Last year, after the Young Women's Project's testified before the Committee on Health about the need for funding for peer educator stipends, your support and help, Councilmember Alexander, DOH allocated \$100,000 for this purpose. In December, this money was made available to our program thanks to HAHSTA. This contract allows YWP to pay the \$7.25/hour stipends of 200 youth health educators working in the DC Peer Educator Network. This contract could extend for an additional 4 years, but without the official allocation of the money, this contract is not guaranteed. Continuation of the contract would require an additional \$157,000 for next year. I am here today to ask you for your support in this endeavor so the program can continue with success. With this money, next year, DC-PEN will employ 250 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.

Although health class plays an important role in educating teens about sexual health, youth health educators can be even more effective in reaching their peers. Boundaries between adults and children make sexual health education, incredibly challenging and is often not be taken seriously. But still, teens need to receive information about safe sex, condom use, consent, gender issues, STIs, birth control options and other important topics. Peer educators who can constantly feed their peers this information in any environment are the only way that teens can be surrounded by valid information that they will take seriously.

As a paid peer educator, I am a strong advocate for paid work because I believe that the cash incentive makes work more effective. Teens are able to gain an understanding of what it means to be employed and how to be an employee. We are introduced to the idea of a paycheck that will require us to learn how to manage money. I have found that the more money I make, the more responsible I feel, and the more inspired I am to continue working. My job at the Young Women's Project is unique because I am being paid to learn. One day I will have a fulltime job, and hopefully a more massive paycheck, both of which I will be able to manage because of my early working experience.

I recommend that more peer educators are trained to work in all DC high schools. If the goal is for teens to have safe, knowledgeable sex, then teens need to have a convenient, reliable support system. Peer educators not only support our communities, we provide crucial information and resources that health teachers can't provide. Please continue to support the Young Women's Project and consider allocating the \$157,000 so we can continue to educate the youth of our city about safe sex. Thank you.