



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

**Christina Ramos
Manager of Youth Development, Training and Reproductive Justice:
The Young Women's Project**

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My name is Christina Ramos and I am the Manager of Youth Development, Training and Reproductive Justice and the Peer Health and Sexuality Education (PHASE) Program at the Young Women's Project (YWP) -- a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can lead campaigns to improve youth-serving institutions. Thank you for providing this opportunity for our youth and me to provide written testimony to the Committee.

The Peer Health and Sexuality Education Project (PHASE) is a teen-adult partnership that 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 on reproductive health issues. Working to reduce unplanned pregnancies and STI-HIV infection rates, PHASE is guided by two long-term goals: 1) To expand Comprehensive Sexual Health Education (CSE) for DC youth and 2) To ensure youth have accessible, high quality reproductive health care services.

In my role as Manager of the PHASE Program, I work with 16 youth staff to develop and deliver sexual health education training programs in six schools. This work takes us into the lunch rooms and classrooms of six DCPS and charter schools. Today I would like to share some observations during two lunch room recruitment sessions and a presentation at one of the DCPS schools we work in:

1. There is no school nurse currently at this school. This has caused a lot of problems for students and has been a barrier to distributing condoms since she is the main person that distributes them.
2. I brought a box full of condoms with me and people were desperate to get them. I placed condoms on my display table (as a display) and as I turned around, they disappeared. This happened over and over again which is a good thing but shows that importance of condom distribution. Two sets of security officers walked up to my display table and said to me, "please bring more of these back. This is the most important thing that Cardozo students can get." An adult staff member said, "We don't have a school nurse so I guess I need to pass out condoms but how will I get them?"
3. A group of three young women with the condoms from my display table were screaming up and down the hallway that a certain young man (who was also present) was the father of two young women's babies and that he needed these condoms. He then got in their faces and cursed one of them up and down and threw her condoms on the floor.
4. Two visibly pregnant teens walked by my table. One teen came up to my table to get condoms and said how she needed them so that she doesn't end up with another child (she has an 8th month old).

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5. Students in my after school presentation on Birth Control did not know the proper way to wear a condom. They thought that wearing two condoms at once would double the protection. One adult staff member asked me about dental dams. Once I explained to her what they were and their purpose, she asked me if she should get them from her dentist.
 6. Two staff members told me that young women don't want to go on the birth control pill because they fear that it will make them sterile. One staff member told me that the new trend is to "do it raw." This means to have sex without a condom.
 7. Another staff member told me that many of her young women tell her that because they haven't gotten pregnant yet, that they think they never will thus do not use any form of birth control. This same staff member told me that this high school has 9 new cases of HIV infection.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these observations.