

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

**Demetrice Lester  
Peer Advocate, Young Women's Project  
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Hello Chairwoman Alexander and other Committee members. My name is Demetrice Lester, I am in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade at the great Roosevelt High School, and I live in ward 8. I am a Peer Advocate at The Young Women's Project. I like to advocate for youth because I love my city, and would like to see it at its best. Because of that, I am very glad to be a part of this organization where I can improve the health of teens in my community.

I testified before you at the Department of Health oversight hearing, and I am here again to talk to you about how important it is that the Department of Health set money aside for peer educator stipends.

Peer educators are community assets and should be treated as such. Through this program, and others like it, youth have been engaged in community wellness projects such as helping with the revision of the Health Education Standards. In this process, we conducted research through surveys and focus groups, health a Student Town Hall, and directed edited the new health standards.

Peer educators also provided feedback on the DOH Youth Sexual Health Plan. We spoke to DOH about the barriers they experience when they try to get services. More than 67 peer educators met with DOH over two days and gave input as DOH staff asked questions. Some of my peers felt that the employees in some locations were disrespectful and didn't treat them with the kind of service they need and deserve. Other students talked about the ways they wanted to learn information or the kinds of services they wanted to see.

It is important that peer educators, like us, are employed and given an opportunity to hold and participate in community meetings to talk about the things that happen within our age group. Youth should be at the table because a lot of the health decisions that happen are for us, but if we aren't acknowledged then these decisions might be wrong, or not justified. Youth know things that are going on that many adults may not know and we can bring that to the attention of the people making decisions.

Paid peer educators, just like other working people in the public health field, are reliable sources of information, and should be listened to. Paying youth for their hard work and their insights, makes us understand that we are valued, just like adults.

For these reasons, I think it is important that DOH allocate funds for peer educator stipends.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.