



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

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Hello! My name is Derrica Vines. I am 16 years old, and a junior at Woodrow Wilson SHS. I am a part of the youth-staff at the Young Women's project under the PHASE-Peer Health and Sexuality Education campaign. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am here today to talk about the WRAP-MC program and the need for full and immediate implementation.

With innovative policies like the condom availability policy in DCPS, young people can access the vital protection that they need to stay safe. Washington, DC is noted by national organizations for its high rate of condom use amongst youth. Even though we have progressive policies, I am here to testify that our implementation of these policies is not up to par. A lack of strong oversight and evaluation prevents initiatives from being effective. As of now the main resource for teens to get condoms is the nurse's office. While this may seem like the best option, my observations and experience suggest differently. We are grateful to have nurses in most DCPS schools. But in many cases, like at Wilson, the nurse is not easy to talk to about sexual health because of her own personal beliefs. Therefore, students do not feel comfortable talking to her or asking for condoms in fear of being judged. One of my associates was in need of condoms but didn't have the money to buy them. I advised her to go to the nurse's office where she should have been allowed to get up to 10 condoms as the condom availability policy states. Unfortunately when she went to the nurses offices she did not see any condoms and was afraid to ask the nurse for them. This is a situation that many of my peers are faced with. What do you do when you're afraid to ask for condoms because of judgment and don't know where to get condoms for free?

Thankfully, HAHSTA, in conjunction with DCPS and OSSE, developed WRAP-MC as a way to promote condom use among youth by allowing trained staff members, in addition to the school nurse, to distribute condoms in schools. In FY 2010, DCPS issued a directive to high school principals to designate a WRAP-MC coordinator and two additional adult staff at each school to distribute condoms.

To date, HAHSTA has reported 250,000 male condoms being distributed in DCPS through nurses and WRAP MCs and training 190 people to distribute condoms via the on-line certification. Meanwhile, based



on a membership survey of 337 students in 6 DCPS high schools conducted by the youth staff at YWP, 82% of students know little to nothing about the WRAP MC program. This didn't make sense to me so I began to wonder about how the program works.

With the high rates of STI's and teen pregnancies in DC, having condoms available in schools is a great strategy for improving youth sexual health. I feel that condom distribution programs allow teens to have greater access to contraception and promote making healthy decisions. Moreover, Wrap MC is a great program in theory because it provides teens with multiple sources to obtain condoms. However, when I wanted to learn more about it, I was faced with a number of barriers. I went on the internet to get information and all I saw was a blog which made me question its credibility. Recently I have learned from last year's Oversight Responses that Wrap MC developers chose a blog because they thought it would be more interactive. On the contrary when I visited the blog I saw no where encouraging me to interact. There was a discussion forum but it only had one irrelevant comment. There are ways to allow people to interact on an official website. I do not believe a blog is as effective as an actual website. Along with establishing credibility a website could provide more helpful information. I believe the website should be bright, colorful and more user-friendly. Users should be able to ask questions and get an answer in a reasonable amount of time. The website should have a listing of all participating schools and their Wrap MC's so that students can easily find out who their representative is. There should also be information or links to locations where people can go to get free condoms if their school doesn't participate in the program or if they are not comfortable getting condoms from their school nurse.

Truthfully, I believe that the youth would feel more comfortable getting condoms from their peers instead of adults. Many of us don't even know who the WRAP-MC person or persons at our schools are. Considering the main way people learn about programs is at school, I think it would be extremely beneficial to announce the programs at school. You could announce it during the morning or afternoon announcements and or place flyers on bulletin boards by the main office. Just by doing that, most people will learn about the program because people talk and the information will spread by word of mouth. In that same vein, because students learn so much from each other, it is not enough to just certify them as condom usage educators. Giving them the opportunity to distribute condoms will increase the number of youth who have access to condoms because youth will not be as worried about judgment from their peers and will feel more comfortable asking for condoms.



Youth voices are often missing from the discussion leading to missed opportunities for youth involvement, insufficient marketing and advertising efforts for health promotion, and underutilized resources (like WRAP MC). It is a proven fact that people learn the most from their peers. Teens are no different. Teens would be more comfortable getting condoms from their peers. Especially peers that are able to answer any questions they may have concerning sex or reproductive health.

This is why I am recommending full and immediate implementation of the WRAP-MC and that students are brought on immediately as condom distributors. We understand that the HAHSTA has had staffing problems and other issues that prevented full implementation. If they are not able to do it – ask for the help of community based groups like YWP. We are willing to do education and condom distribution in high schools. All of our staff is already certified via the WRAP-MC on-line certification program. And we will do it for free. Here are some other suggestions for improving WRAP-MC effectiveness:

- Include the list of certified WRAP-MC contacts on the website
- Get the condoms (male and female) out to the schools that need them. For the past couple weeks, we've been sharing our condoms with Cardozo High School because they are out and have not received more from DOH. Please get them some condoms!
- Certify students to distribute condoms – 4 or 5 students at each grade level
- Have information and condom distribution tables as a regular part of student lunch time
- Have the opportunity for after school sex-ed workshops for students who want more information. YWP is happy to provide these along with several CBOS

Overall I believe that D.C public schools should ensure that each and every school in the District does have a program that distributes condoms and promotes safe sex effectively. Thank you for your time and I hope you will consider my recommendations.