

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

**Isabel Suarez
Peer Trainer, Young Women's Project
April 14, 2016**

Hello Chairwoman Alexander and other Committee members. My name is Isabel Suarez, I am in my junior year at Wilson High School, and I live in ward 3. I am a Peer Trainer at The Young Women's Project. This is the second year I have been working at YWP, and it has been a very valuable experience so far. It has taught so many important things about my health, and how I can help others around me.

The Youth Health Educator Program is doing much more than reducing pregnancies and STIs- it is developing youth leaders who are doing well in school and improving the DC community. A program like YWP develops youth leaders by empowering teens to speak out for something they care about, which is not always something we are able to do. It gives young people the opportunity to give important and relevant information to others, and to be knowledgeable about something they are passionate about. This knowledge gives us the power to go farther and lead people. Programs like this also give those involved a sense of purpose to have a job where people care about them, and attain a greater role in their school community.

Additionally, being a part of a program like YWP prepares youth for jobs later in life. This job gives us the flexibility we need in our busy, unpredictable lives. Being a part of this makes youth comfortable with having responsibilities outside of school and family, and getting paid for it. It prepares you for life outside of high school; whether that is college, work or something else. Programs like YWP gives employees a structured environment, but also prepares them for adulthood.

YWP has given my friends and I a new reputation at school as "condom people." Now, when I hear people saying misinformation, I will never let them go away without saying "actually that's wrong, and here's why." It has made me aware of just how misguided I **was**, and other people **are** with sexual health. This makes me want to be more active in my school community, and help those around me. Aside from this, I row on the varsity crew team and do theatre productions at Wilson. I make a point to discuss my job and things I've

learned with my teammates and friends. I believe that everyone should be as informed as people who work at YWP.

Aside from reproductive health and work readiness, YWP creates a community environment where we discuss school and plans for the future. The majority of YWP high school seniors are college-bound, and YWP helps us get into college by providing recommendation letters, and providing us with valuable extracurricular activities: 99% of our seniors were accepted to college or applied to college and waiting for results and 70% of our youth educators participate in college prep services. Also having people who are kind and interested about not just the work you do, but also how you're doing, and your life overall makes this space something more than just a place to do work. It is a place that is really safe, comfortable and rewarding for people. This community feeling is what I value most about my job.

Thank you for your time, and please consider continuing funding for programs like this.