

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

**James Peters
Young Women's Project Peer Educator**

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Hello Chairwoman Alexander and other Committee members. My name is James Peters and I am a junior at Bell Multicultural High School. I am sixteen years old. I enjoy playing sports and spending time with my friends. Next year I plan on joining the SGA and hospitality programs at my school. After I graduate high school, I plan on enrolling in college where I will pursue a career in law. I'm interested in a HBCU college-- Clark Atlanta, Morehouse, or maybe Bowie State.

I am here as a youth health educator at the Young Women's Project (YWP) --a multicultural organization that builds the leadership and power of DC youth so that they can shape policies and institutions to expand the rights and opportunities of DC youth. I work in the Peer Health and Sexuality Education campaign, a youth-adult partnership that works to improve DC teens' reproductive health by expanding comprehensive sexuality education, ensuring access to community based services, and engaging teen women and men as peer educators and decision-makers. As a peer educator, I am a leader in my school. I hold class/lunchroom presentations where I educate my peers about sexual health issues. I also train other youth health educators. The main part of my job is distributing condoms to the students at my school.

Today I would like to talk about my work as a second year youth health educator, and what we have been working on since last year. Thank you for hearing my testimony.

This is my second year as a health educator. This year I changed schools from Roosevelt to Bell Multicultural High School. so I needed time for everyone to get to know me. They had to get used to me. I see the same things at Bell that I saw at Roosevelt. Mostly, it's the men taking condoms, and only a few women. I teach a lot of people about proper condom use. I get the same questions but my answers are better this year. I am also trying to educate the teachers about the Youth Educator Program. A lot of teachers don't know what we do so I had to educate the teachers. One teacher thought we were promoting sex. I told him we were there for the students that are sexually active. There is more abstinence at Bell than Roosevelt less sexually active teens, which is a positive thing.

This year being a new student has impacted my condom distribution. When we started in late October it was difficult to pass out condom, it was getting tough to match my numbers from last year because I was still getting to know everybody. Then I found a breakthrough in early February: the fanny pack. I started packing my condoms in a fanny pack provided by my job and the rest was history. The first day, I wore my fanny pack people were staring at me. They would ask "why do you have that thing on?". This was my plan. I knew students would be curious about the fanny pack and then I could start a conversation about our work more easily. I use the fanny as an icebreaker, as something different. It was like magic. A senior said "Oh he got condoms in there!" and another peer said "Yeah you didn't know that's his job?" Then the next thing I knew, everyone in the hallway was taking condoms- even a few girls! More people started to take condoms and ask more questions about my work. Of course my friends tease me about my fanny pack, but they can't deny that the strategy works. I take my fanny pack in the lunchroom and that's where I distribute the most condoms. So when you see me working you see my fanny pack.

Last year, we came to this Committee asking for your support to expand the program and put peer educator stipends in the budget. Thanks to you and other Committee members YWP has been able to expand the number of peer educators that we train and get money in the budget to pay more youth educators. We now have 58 youth educators and will have 200 in our Youth Health Educator Program (YHEP) by the end of the year. The job we are doing is important. A lot of students need this information. Paid stipends help the youth educators and help us get more students involved.

With this support we have been able to accomplish a lot. Last school year my co-workers and I distributed 11,074 external condoms, 11,90 internal condoms, 1,037 flavored condoms, 1,223 packets of lubricant, and 339 dental dams. We also conducted 4,000 educational interventions. So far this school year, we have distributed 8943 external condoms, 1,198 internal condoms, 2,011 flavored condoms, 1,1573 packets of lubricant and 252 dental dams. We have conducted 11 lunchroom presentations reaching 449 teens, and 2,785 one-on-one education sessions. We will be expanding the program to include 200 youth educators through the DC Peer Educator Network.

Another thing I've been working on this year is revising DC's Health Education Standards. This is something that we brought to the Committee last year and you supported -- so thank you. Since last May, we have

been able to work closely with the State Board of Education (SBOE) staff and SBOE President Jack Jacobson, and the staff and leaders at the DCPS Office of Teaching and Learning to research and draft the standards. We started our work on this last May when we started gathering information through surveys and focus groups with more than 300 youth and then worked on specific issues during the summer. We worked in teams to research and present the issues to the SBOE and Standards Working Group.

My work has been going well, even if I did change schools. I have some recommendations to make this work even better.

1. **I would like more school staff to learn about and support our program.** I feel like our deans should be more supportive of our work . Maybe we can have an assembly at the beginning of the year so that the whole school can familiarize themselves with us and know what we do.
2. **I think the health teachers could recommend us to students with sexual health problems or needs.** I also envision them assisting us with our lunchroom presentations at first, so that the students know they can trust us to have good information.
3. **We can use more magnum condoms.** That's the request that our peers give all youth health educators. They want the magnums, so we need more magnums to do a good job meeting their needs.
4. **Lastly I the DOH should continue to support the DC Peer Educator Network.** I think this program should spread to all other schools because six DCPS schools isn't enough more students can benefit from this work.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony, and I hope you take my suggestions into consideration.