

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

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Good afternoon Council member Alexander and other council members. Thank you for hearing my testimony. My name is Lena Jones. I am in the 11th grade at Wilson. I am singer songwriter and love being in musicals. I also love learning new things and teaching others what I've learned. I've been working for the Young Women's Project (YWP) as a youth educator with the Wrap MC program since October at Wilson. YWP builds the leadership and power of young women so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth. YWP's peer educator program is working in conjunction with the youth pilot Wrap-MC program being implemented by HAHSTA and DCPS. I want to thank Principal Cahall and Mr. Wilson for supporting this work.

I got involved with Wrap MC because it sounded interesting and I wanted to learn new things about sexual health. I am also interested in becoming a teacher when I get older so I thought this job would be a good experience to have before becoming a teacher. I am here to testify about student awareness of condom availability at Wilson, STI testing at school, the health education credit/information covered in health class, and lunch food options.

I'm a peer sex educator and I distribute condoms in my school. It's been pretty interesting. A lot of people I know are sexually active so I talk to them, give them information, and answer their questions. I make sure they tell their friends to come to me if they have any questions. It was pretty difficult in the beginning because it was a new job and I didn't know how to approach people. Over the course of a few months it's gotten better. I've been able to find people who come to me regularly for condoms, dental dams, or just questions.

Peer education and condom distribution at Wilson creates a more comfortable and safe aura to talk about sex and an open place for any questions so that youth can get more educated. Many young people would rather talk to peers because they feel as though they can relate to them and that they can give better, more relatable information. A lot of people, when they see me and I ask them if they want any condoms, get very giggly. They think sex has this taboo on it. In other cases, people are very enthusiastic; they're like, "Sure!"

Of course I'll take some condoms." They ask me about what I do, where I work, and how things have been going. Some kids take it seriously and think that passing out condoms is important at Wilson. They say, "I'm glad you're a Wrap MC. I think it's important for people to know about this stuff." Other people take the condoms but are not interested in getting information.

Something I want to see improved at my school is student awareness about the condom availability program. A lot of people know that condoms are located in the nurse's office but not many people know that they are located in adult WMCs offices like Mr. Wilson's office. I would also like people to be more aware of the WMC program and YWP in my school. Many people do not know about Wrap MC's and I think it would be beneficial if they knew more about us. One of the things that the YWP educators will be doing in the next month is classroom presentations. This will help raise awareness among students and teachers about the program. But I think a school wide presentation would be the most effective way to get people more aware of WMC and condom availability because the whole school could attend therefore the whole, or most of the school would at least recognize the name WMC.

Recently, at my school, HAHSTA did STI testing. There was a short presentation about bacterial and viral STIs and then free testing for gonorrhea, Chlamydia, and this year HIV. I got tested for HIV and while I was in the waiting room, I was able to meet some of the other students and distribute condoms. It was really exciting because a lot of people wanted them and were really enthusiastic. They asked me questions and I got into a nice, real, and interesting conversation with some 9th graders. They took male condoms and then asked me how to use female condoms and dental dams. I answered their questions and did some demonstrations. I learned that many of my peers do not know about female condoms or are not familiar with them and that many people do not use dental dams. I really enjoyed being able to talk with my peers seriously about HIV and STI testing and condom use. They are not just throwing condoms on the ground or taking them so I could fill a quota.

STI testing is important at Wilson because many people do not know where to go if they wanted to get tested. So having it available at school gives people the opportunity to get tested. This testing also allows me and other WMC's to reach people who are interested in getting condoms because many of the people who want to get tested also are sexually active and use condoms. This year many 9th grade classes were

not scheduled to receive the presentation or get tested. Mixed classes that included 9th graders were able to go. I think 9th grader should be made a priority when it comes to STI testing.

I'd also like to see the health education class credit extended. Right now it's mandatory to take health class for half a year. I think that it would help many if health class were a full year. You would be able to cover physical health but go way more in depth in sexual health. I know many people at Wilson who are sexually active and would benefit from a more in depth class. Even though health classes are teaching abstinence not many people perform it. I suggest in depth education on condom use, contraception, pregnancy prevention and options, and preventing STIs. When I took health class last year as a sophomore I found it very helpful. I was not well educated in sexual health whatsoever. My health teacher was very good at teaching and tried to get us involved in the class. I wish we could have had more time to talk about different contraceptives as well as HIV and AIDS. We had to cut short because we had to talk about drugs and alcohol. We did have MTA come discuss AIDS and HIV with us which was really interesting. I wish we could have gone more in depth in the biology of it like the infecting cells and so on.

We have testified before the Committee on Education to expand and improve sexual health education in three ways: 1) By increasing the health credit from .5 to 1 full credit (as recommended by the State Board of Education); 2) By revising the health standards to include more objectives focused on comprehensive sexual health education; and 3) By ensuring that the curricula covers a range of issues, including reproductive anatomy, menstruation, pregnancy options, contraception, STIs/HIV, healthy relationships, gender and sexuality, youth rights, and community resources. As a member of this Committee, we are asking you to support this recommendation.

I also wish we had more time to discuss bullying and cyber bullying. At Wilson there is not sever bullying but there is still bullying. People will say things that they think are funny but actually hurt the person they are saying it to. This is another topic to cover in health class. I talked to my teacher asking her if we were going to be able to focus on that topic and she said because the class is only a half year we could not. I think bullying is a very important topic in school especially in high school because people are developing and growing up, switching from different social groups and trying to find their way. When they are finding their way they could push someone aside in the process. I think people should know what bullying is and the different types of bullying. I know people who think teasing and name-calling isn't bullying when in the

definition of bullying those things are classified as it. We do have counselors at Wilson but many people including myself love my counselor but would not feel comfortable talking to them if we got bullied. Also certain counselors are very busy and never seem to have enough time to sit down and talk for while. So it would be interesting and also beneficial if there were some mental health/ emotional health resources in the school like a pamphlet that has a list of therapists or people for those that are mentally and emotionally worn. I have not brought it up with administration at my school yet. I plan to bring this up with them soon because I think it is important that students have a safe place where they can talk to an adult that is located at school.

I'd also like to see some change in the lunch food options. Wilson serves breakfast, lunch, and an after-school supper, but a lot of the times the food is not necessarily healthy or well prepared and there are not many options, especially the lunch food. There is a salad for those that want salad or those that cannot eat meat, but it would also be good to have the hot lunch food serve more options for vegetarians. The food served now I believe should be better prepared. The type of food served is pizza, chopped chicken with rice, chicken sandwiches, canned fruit on the side, and sometimes greens. They always have the option of fruit or greens on the side but not everything is fresh. My friends always tell me what they thought of lunch. Most people say "eh" or "I'm just eating because I'm hungry" or "surprisingly good." I feel that the lunch food should never be surprisingly good but moderate-good all the time. I would like to see more fresh veggies and fruits served with the lunches I would also like to see not just cheese pizza for vegetarians but veggie pizza as well. Also for a hot dish that is vegetarian beans and rice or lentils. I would like to see the food cooked better. Sometimes the chicken sandwiches that the school serves do not look very well cooked it just looked like it was heated up from a frozen package. If I were in charge of the cafeteria I would try and get the cooks and myself to pre-make nice food and then put them in the refrigerator, then heat them up before lunchtime. The food wouldn't be processed frozen food it would be easy hand made dishes that are healthy and delicious.

Thank you for your time and listening to my testimony.