

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

**Paul Weaver**  
**Wrap MC Peer Educator, Young Women's Project**  
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Good morning Hello Council Member Alexander and other Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to give my testimony here today. My name is Paul Weaver. I am a 14 year old 9th grade student attending Woodrow Wilson High School. I plan to, someday, get a law degree and become a lawyer. I am currently doing work for the Young Women's Project (YWP).

I have been participating in training along with other DCPS students who are being trained by YWP as peer educators and are also part of the Wrap MC's Youth Pilot program implemented by HAHSTA. We work to distribute condoms to students, educating our peers on sexual health, and acting as a liaison for the youth in schools. We teach our peers how to have healthy relationships and we answer any questions they might have as well. I want to thank Principal Cahall, Mr. Wilson and my teachers for supporting this program and YWP's work at my school. I'm testifying today to show the benefits of Peer Educators - both personal and for the community- and the need for having as many as possible in our DC schools.

Becoming a Wrap MC was, for me, a very liberating experience. I thought this would be an interesting job that would allow me to work with my friends, and I have been correct in assuming so. We were able to interact with our peers as leaders, not just as people that walk around handing out condoms, but more like peer navigators. During my Wrap MC experience, we were taught how to address sensitive matters with a positive attitude and apply them to real life situations. I have come across a fair number of the situations from trainings as a peer educator. For instance, there were a lot of people who didn't know that wearing two condoms is counterproductive. The only reason I know this to be incorrect is because of my Wrap MC experience. Proper condom use was the first thing I learned during training.

This training really changed the way I behave in certain situations. I, like many others, would joke when one of my teachers would talk to the class about things like sex. It was funny. There are many people at

my school who believe that they have a lot of knowledge regarding sexual health, when really they only know the very basic things regarding STI's and proper condom use. They don't know that, at this age, sexual health knowledge is necessary and should be much more common. I used to be one of them, but now I'm beginning to grasp the seriousness of sexual education.

My peers now see me as a source of information and are willing to talk to me more. Even though people refer to me as 'one of those condom people', they do know that I am informed on things related to sex. I've even been approached by some people I didn't even know just because I wore the Wrap MC bag or button. Even my teachers have tried to talk to me about my work and give me ideas on how to distribute condoms around my school.

Still, the amount of people that can come to an individual peer educator to ask questions about how to practice safe sex is limited. I already know that some of my peers can actually use a condom, but my goal is to reach the whole school. There's only so much a single Wrap MC can do and, the fact is, there aren't enough of us. Even though, the nurse always has condoms and there are some peer educators, it's really about the willingness of an individual student to seek us out as well. Students and school staff need to know more about the peer educators in their schools.

I would like to give you some recommendations for enhancing this program:

We should expand the Wrap MC program and employ more peer educators. It's clear to us as students and individuals that we can't get to everyone in the entire school. The ratio of students to current Wrap MC's is 163 to 1 at Woodrow Wilson, which has the largest amount of YWP Wrap MC peer educators. One thing I have come to notice personally among the people who ask me about being a Wrap MC is the interest in having a paid job. Of course money is a very motivating reason for students to get involved, and this is a big way for us to get the school community interested in this program as a whole. I really think that the students should be rewarded for the time they put into the Wrap MC program and I'm sure others will too. If students are receiving stipends for this work, I'm certain there will be far more application for Wrap MC positions.

We need more school activities that involve peer educators so that we can be recognized. For example, the school-based STI testing program that comes to DCPS high schools should formally integrate youth Wrap MCs into their work. We could help with promotion, while at the same time be recognized as a part of the school health system.

We need more school data available. We need information so that we can tell if we are having an impact on the school. I know data is being collected but we don't have access to it. Getting access is crucial for pinpointing which teens who need sexual health education. All too often our Wrap MC's are spread too thin trying to help their own familiar audiences, but they don't know who in our schools really needs the most interventions.

If these things can come to pass in our schools, I know that we can make sexual health awareness widespread in our youth. Having a larger peer educator force, involving the school community in our work, and having accurate data is a necessary step for a "Rubber Revolution" to take place in our city. *Thank you.*