

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

**Ramia Wilson
Young Women's Project Youth Staff Member**

March 7, 2014

Hello Council Member Alexander and other Committee members. My name is Ramia Wilson and I attend Calvin Coolidge High School. I like to sing, dance, make people laugh, and play volleyball. I am currently Ms. Coolidge and I'm the drum majorette. I plan to go to college and major in criminal justice. I do want to get a Ph.D. I plan to be an FBI Agent or work with the CIA. If that doesn't work, I plan to be an entertainer, and have my own TV show. I am a peer educator at the Young Women's Project (YWP). YWP peer educators are part of the Wrap-MC Youth Pilot program at HAHSTA. I am here today update you on YWP's peer education work and what YWP has been able to do to implement HAHSTA's condom availability program in the public schools. I would like to thank Principal Dr. Lawrence for his support of this program.

I became a peer educator because I wanted to tell more people about sex. As a peer educator, I just don't talk about sex. I talk about relationships too. Rather than health professionals educating students at school, the idea behind peer education is that ordinary lay people are in the best position to encourage healthy behavior to each other. Some teenagers do not know what an STI is. Can you fault them? The reason is they don't have people to teach them. When someone says the wrong thing, I can correct them. I can be very persuasive at times too. I am a real jumpy person. I like to be happy and get people going. I love when people come to me for information and for condoms. It makes me feel powerful because someone is trusting me with confidential information. It makes me feel like I am worthy. Why would someone come to me. I play a lot. Why would they take me serious? They wouldn't trust me with information? But they do.

Being an YWP peer educator taught me a lot about being in relationships and helped me to improve my own relationship . It made me think about what it means to be in a healthy relationships and it made me change my ways. We talked about emotions and power. There were scenarios about how you communicate. One thing was we had to disagree or agree about if it's ok for your boyfriend or girlfriend to call you out your name if you guys are playing. Since people said its ok, the other question was is it ok for them to call you out of your name when an argument occurs?

Everyone comes to me for condoms, my friends and even people I don't know including underclassman. When people come to me, I sit down with them and talk to them about what they need. I say, anything you need I got you. Then have to check off all the stuff on the data sheet that we need to collect for YWP. Then I talk about where to get tested. I used to be a volunteer with MTA so I know about testing sites. I don't judge them. I am here to help them. Youth are comfortable going to other youth for condoms. I wouldn't want to go to a teacher. That is just weird. I am cool with the teachers but I just wouldn't go to them. That's why people come to me for condoms and other information. I can tell them where to get tested. I can tell them how to recognize STIs. The most questions I get are about STIs. Girls are more willing to come to me for information. They ask me about symptoms. We have been getting a lot of support from teachers and administrators. The parent resources coordinator said he was proud of me. It's something that I would never expect myself to do.

Here are some things that would help me do my job better as a peer educator

- 1) We need more access to school-based testing. DOH tests DCPS students once a year. I would like to see the Department of Health make it their priority to come to high schools twice a year to do testing. Youth need to have more reliable sources. I wish more people would go to the school health clinic to go tested but they are worried about the information going home to their parents. One girl was saying she think she has genital warts so I was able to intervene and talk her through the symptoms. People don't realize that a lot of STIs are not curable. You can treat herpes or HPV but you can't cure it. A lot of people don't know where to go testing. Me personally, whenever I go to the school's clinic to get anything checked out, I get a bill sent home. Why am I paying to get checked out? Why should youth get an STI test if they are going to get it sent home sent home? That is so embarrassing. Even if it's positive, you still wouldn't want your parents to know that you are having sex. Youth don't have the mail box keys. The mail will be there. I think the schools that have clinics should have free testing. You should not have to give your name. I think a mobile van would help too. And incentives. If you really want youth to get tested, give them a \$5 gift card to McDonald's. The whole school would be there.
- 2) We need a variety of condoms, flavored condoms for oral sex, and flavored lube. If you are trying to teach people how to be safe with oral sex – you need to provide flavored condoms. Also – we need more magnums. A lot of people don't want to take condoms unless they are magnums. Once you say magnum their whole mood changes. They get a happy face. If you want young people to use condoms, the magnums. Magnums make people feel big and important. If I was a male I would want a magnum too! While in training I bought up

why men don't wear small condoms (Lifestyle). And why more men would prefer bigger condoms (magnum). So I did a demonstration. I opened the Lifestyle condom first, and then I put it on my hand and then rolled it so it can be on my arm. Guess what? It popped. Then I did the same thing with the Magnum. It didn't pop. This is why more men will prefer Magnum. And this is why they wouldn't take the Lifestyle.

- 3) Better sex education in high school: When I took health class, the teacher was not teaching us anything. We were chilling half the time. He gave us the answers. We did not learn anything. In health class the teacher suppose to have us to understand the advantages and disadvantages of sex, and relationships. Health class today isn't what it seems. Majority of the students just laugh about. Teachers need to make sure that students have the right information and that they know what to do with that information. When teachers give the answers -- we are not learning or studying anything. If I can improve the class I will have the school peer educators to do a weekly lesson about the structure they are learning. I will also have demonstrations.
- 4) We need a Wrap-MC program in junior high. We need to be educating youth about HIV and STIs in middle school. She was 11 and some people came to her school to do a survey and she mistakenly thought she had it. No one gave her the right information. Next thing you know she came home and said mom I have HIV. She seemed happy about it. At the moment it was funny. My mom told her she doesn't have that. Then she cried when she watched the movie temptation because the lady found out she had HIV. So what I did was school my 13 year old sister about HIV and STI. of course she was disgusted. But they aren't teaching them HIV and STIs. This is ridiculous. Middle school kids are having sex. Wrap mc should be in middle schools. Do the same training break it down more. Kids are having sex at 11. They don't know what is going on. They don't know anything about it. What if someone asks to have sex they don't know what is going on. They are not teaching it in schools. Why not. Sex ed should start in middle should talk about biology but also relationships. Youth do not know what a relationship is. Break that down too.

Thank you for listening. It's very important to hear what youth have to say about health because we are the main ones doing it.