

# The Real Education for Healthy Youth Act

## Honest, Age-appropriate Sexual Health Education For Responsible Decision Making

The Real Education for Healthy Youth Act (H.R. 1706, S. 2765), was reintroduced by Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) in March 2015 and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) in April 2016. REHYA would ensure that federal funding is allocated to comprehensive sexual health education programs that provide young people with the skills and information they need to make informed, responsible, and healthy decisions. This legislation sets forth a vision for comprehensive sexual health education programs in the United States.

### WHAT WOULD THE REAL EDUCATION FOR HEALTHY YOUTH ACT DO?

The Real Education for Healthy Youth Act outlines criteria for content in federally-funded sex education programs. The bill outlines a holistic approach to sexual health and provides funding for comprehensive sexual health education programs which:

- Recognize young people's right to sexual health information;
- Define comprehensive sexual health education programs as those which include information on-
  - anatomy and physiology
  - growth and development
  - healthy relationships
  - prevention of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, through abstinence and contraception
  - gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation
  - protection from dating violence, sexual assault, bullying, and harassment;
- Are evidence-based, or include characteristics of effective programs that have proven effective in changing the sexual behavior of young people;
- Provide medically accurate and age-appropriate information; and

- Are inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, and survivors of sexual abuse and assault.

The Senate version repeals and reprograms the Social Security Act Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage state grant program to fund the new REHYA grant programs.

### WHO IS PROVIDED FUNDING UNDER THE REAL EDUCATION FOR HEALTHY YOUTH ACT?

Federal funding would be provided to institutions teaching comprehensive sexual health education to adolescents and college students, including departments of education; non-profit organizations; state, local and tribal organizations; departments of health; and institutions of higher education. Priority in funding is given to communities with high rates of health disparities in unintended pregnancy, STIs, and dating violence and sexual assault, as well as institutions of higher education that serve a large number of students of color and Pell grant recipients. In addition to grants for educating young people, funding is directed to pre-service and in-service teacher training for K-12 sex educators to increase effective teaching of comprehensive sexual health education.

### WHY IS THE REAL EDUCATION FOR HEALTHY YOUTH ACT NECESSARY?

Sixty-three percent of young people will have sex before they graduate high school ; and 95 percent will have sex before they are married. For young people to make healthy decisions about sex, we need to provide them the skills and information they need.

Young people are disproportionately impacted by STIs, including HIV, and unintended pregnancy.

- Approximately 43.1 percent of sexually active students reported not using condoms at last intercourse.<sup>1</sup>
- It is estimated that more than 625,000 women under 20 become pregnant each year.<sup>3</sup>

# “Sixty-three percent of young people will have sex before they graduate high school<sup>1</sup>; and 95 percent will have sex before they are married.<sup>2</sup> For young people to make healthy decisions about sex, we need to provide them the skills and information they need.”

- The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate (72 pregnancies per 1000 young women ages 15-19) of developed nations, with a teen pregnancy rate over four times that of the Netherlands (14), over three times that of Germany (19), and almost three times that of France (26).<sup>4</sup>
- Approximately 400,000 teens every year give birth in the U.S. Of those who gave birth, 50 percent were not using birth control and 31 percent of these believed they could not get pregnant.<sup>5</sup>
- The CDC reports that young people ages 15-24 account for almost half of the 19 million new STIs every year.<sup>6</sup>
- Young people ages 13-24 account for 26 percent of new HIV infections.<sup>7</sup>
- Youth of color are disproportionately affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Young African Americans accounted for 57 percent of HIV diagnoses among those 13-24.<sup>7</sup> African American/Black young men who have sex with men (YMSM) accounted for nearly 58 percent of all YMSM ages 13-24 with HIV infection in 2011, followed by Hispanic/Latino YMSM (20 percent).<sup>8</sup>

Comprehensive sexual health education helps reduce the rates of STIs and unintended pregnancy among young people by providing complete and accurate information to help young people make responsible, informed decisions about sex and healthy relationships. Research has shown effective sex education programs have positive outcomes among young people such as delaying the initiation of sex, decreasing the number of sexual partners, and increasing the use of contraception and

condoms.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the government still allocates millions of dollars to abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.<sup>10</sup> In fact, research has shown that young people in abstinence-only-until-marriage programs that promote “virginity pledges” still engage in sexual activity before marriage and are less likely to protect themselves when they do have sex.<sup>11</sup>

Surveys on research of youth around our nation have also reported high rates of bullying, harassment and dating violence.

- Three-quarters of LGBT students reported being harassed in the last year, 56% reported feeling unsafe, and one-third skipped at least one day of school in the past month because of concerns about their safety.<sup>12</sup>
- Surveys show that 6.7 percent of high school students have been forced to have intercourse and 9.6 percent have experienced dating violence.<sup>1</sup>

Comprehensive sex education can help combat the rise in dating violence and bullying among youth. Studies have led researchers to recommend that information on healthy relationships be integrated into sex education programs.<sup>13</sup> One study reported that students were 60 percent less likely to perpetrate forms of dating violence against a partner after being taught a safe dating curriculum.<sup>14</sup> Research has also demonstrated that students positively benefit from an LGBT inclusive curriculum. Furthermore, students who attend LGBT inclusive schools are less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation (42 percent vs. 64 percent) or gender expression (28 percent vs. 41 percent) and about half as likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable (17 percent vs. 31 percent).<sup>15</sup>

## **PUBLIC OPINION ON COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

Public opinion polls have consistently demonstrated that the majority of Americans support the teaching of comprehensive sex education to our nation’s young people. Over 90 percent of American adults favor courses that teach contraception in addition to abstinence,<sup>16</sup> and close to 70 percent oppose federal funding for programs that do not teach about condoms and contraception.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, studies show that 90 percent of the engaged public supports age-appropriate and medically accurate sex education for all students beginning in early grades and up into high schools and close

to 70 percent oppose federal funding for programs that do not teach about condoms and contraception.<sup>18</sup>

Support exists across party lines for comprehensive sex education. According to a recent poll, 75 percent of Republicans, 79 percent of Independents, and 85 percent of Democrats support it. Of those who identify with the Tea Party, 54 percent favor the teaching of comprehensive sex education. There is also strong support across religious groups with 78 percent of Catholics, 74 percent of black Protestants, and 62 percent of white evangelicals in favor of teaching comprehensive sex education in public schools.<sup>19</sup>

Advocates for Youth © September 2015

Written by Jendayi Phillip, Updated by Zenen Jaimes Pérez and Abbey Marr

## REFERENCES

1. Eaton DK, et al. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2011. *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*, 2014; 63(4):1-162. Available from: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2015/ss6506\\_updated.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2015/ss6506_updated.pdf)
2. Finer L. Trends in premarital sex in the United States, 1954-2003. *Public Health Reports*, 2007; 23: 73.
3. Kost K, et al. U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010: National Trends by Age, Race and Ethnicity. Guttmacher Institute, 2014. Available from: <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/USTPtrends10.pdf>.
4. Bridges, E. Unintended Pregnancy Among Young People in the United States: Dismantling Structural Barriers to Prevention. *Advocates for Youth*, 2011.
5. Centers for Disease Control. Pregnancy Contraceptive Use Among Teens With Unintended Pregnancies Resulting in Live Births-Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), 2004-2008. *MMWR Weekly*, 2012; 61(2):25-29. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6102a1.htm>.
6. Centers for Disease Center. STD's in Adolescents and Young Adults – Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance Report, 2014. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats13/adol.htm>
7. Centers for Disease Control. HIV Among Youth, 2015. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/youth/>.
8. Centers for Disease Control. HIV and Young Men Who Have Sex with Men, 2014. Available from: [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sexualbehaviors/pdf/hiv\\_factsheet\\_ymsm.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/sexualbehaviors/pdf/hiv_factsheet_ymsm.pdf)
9. Santelli J et al. Changing Behavioral Risk for Pregnancy Among High School Students in the United States, 1991–2007. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2009; 45(1).
10. SIECUS. SIECUS State Profiles: A Portrait of Sexuality Education and Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs in the States. New York: Author, 2012. <http://www.siecus.org/document/docWindow.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=242&documentFormatId=302>.
11. Brückner H, Bearman P. After the promise: the STD consequences of adolescent virginity pledges. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2005; 36:271-278.

## CO-SPONSOR THE REAL EDUCATION FOR HEALTHY YOUTH ACT

- Young people have the right to lead healthy lives. Providing them with honest, age appropriate comprehensive sexual health education is an integral part of helping them take personal responsibility for their health and well-being.

12. GLSEN. The 2013 National School Climate Survey. New York: Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network; 2012. Available from: <http://glsen.org/nscls>.

13. Futures Without Violence. The Connection Between Dating Violence and Unhealthy Behaviors. Available from: <http://www.startstrongteens.org/sites/default/files/Futures%20Without%20Violence%20The%20Connection%20between%20Dating%20Violence%20and%20Unhealthy%20Behaviors.pdf>.

14. Foshee VA, et al. An Evaluation of Safe Dates, an Adolescent Dating Violence Prevention Program. *American Journal of Public Health* 1998;88:45-50. Available from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1508378/pdf/amjph00013-0047.pdf>.

15. GLSEN. Teaching Respect Finds Having an LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum Related to Improved School Climate for LGBT Youth, 2012. Available from: <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2864.html?state=research&type=research>.

16. Press Release, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, Teens Say Parents Most Influence Their Decisions About Sex (Aug. 28, 2012) at <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/press/pdf/wov-2012-parents.pdf> (last visited Oct. 19, 2012).

17. Wilson SN. Sexuality Education: Our Current Status, and an Agenda for 2010. *Family Planning Perspectives* 2000; 32:5. Available from: <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3225200.pdf>.

18. NARAL Pro-Choice America. Americans Support Responsible Sex Education, 2015. Available from: <http://www.prochoiceamerica.org/media/fact-sheets/americans-support-responsible.pdf>.

19. Jones RP, et al. Committed to Availability, Conflicted about Morality. *Public Religion Research Institute*, 2011. Available from: <http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Millennials-Abortion-and-Religion-Survey-Report.pdf>.

## **MISSION**

Advocates for Youth partners with youth leaders, adult allies, and youth-serving organizations to advocate for policies and champion programs that recognize young people's rights to: honest sexual health information; accessible, confidential, and affordable sexual health services; and the resources and opportunities necessary to create sexual health equity for all youth.

## **OUR VISION: THE 3RS**

Advocates' vision is informed by its core values of Rights.Respect.Responsibility.

Advocates believe that:

**RIGHTS** Youth have the inalienable right to honest sexual health information; confidential, consensual sexual health services; and equitable opportunities to reach their full potential.

**RESPECT** Youth deserve respect. Valuing young people means authentically involving them in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being.

**RESPONSIBILITY** Society has the responsibility to provide young people with all of the tools they need to safeguard their sexual health, and young people have the responsibility to protect themselves.