

From: NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut

To: the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee Hearing on "Adolescent Health Care"

June 21, 2011

As President of the Board of Directors of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut, I submit this written testimony to the Public Review Investigations Committee, with the goal of helping the legislature to improve the overall health of adolescents in our state.

I have worked for New Haven Public Schools, teaching 9th grade history for the past four years. Before teaching, I worked for six years as an outreach worker with pregnant and parenting teens, also in New Haven. As a longtime advocate for teenagers, I hope to highlight two areas that I believe are most important to their health and wellbeing.

First, I believe that mental and physical wellness must be promoted as a lifestyle choice to teens. Rather than focusing on a deficit model, and interacting with teenagers only when they become sick, I believe teenagers must be provided with multiple opportunities to learn about health and wellness from trusted adults. For example, providing teenagers with factual, non-judgmental information about, as well as access to, nutrition, exercise and stress management will empower them to make decisions that will positively impact their overall health. In my work as a teacher, I observe the negative effects of stress on adolescents. Not only can it affect their family and peer relationships, it can also severely interfere with their academic success. Teens must be taught how manage stress in their lives while also learning how to make positive decisions that reduce stress in the first place.

Second, I believe that teenagers must have multiple opportunities throughout their adolescence to learn how to prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Access to accurate information and confidential healthcare from trusted professionals will enable teens to make prevention a part of their long-term healthcare plans.

As a teacher I know that teenagers need multiple opportunities to learn and practice what the curriculum instructs me to teach. I believe there is no difference when it comes to the information necessary to their mental and physical health and wellness. With increased access to accurate information and programs from trusted adults, teenagers will be better able to navigate their adolescence, minimize risk and develop positive habits to carry into adulthood.

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