

**Testimony of Susan Lloyd Yolen, Vice President, Public Policy and Advocacy  
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England**

**Program Review and Investigations Committee hearing on Adolescent Health, June 21, 2011**

Good afternoon members of the committee. I represent Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, the largest provider of reproductive health care and family planning in Connecticut. In Connecticut, we serve about 65,000 patients annually at eighteen health centers. About 18 per cent of our patients are adolescents under age twenty.

We believe that adolescents, as they mature, need and deserve direct access to health care services. As they begin to make important decisions about their own lives, bodies and health, adolescents need to learn how to take responsibility for the treatment they may need as a result. You will have heard from school-based health centers that make such care available on the school premises for teens without access to other health care resources. You will have heard from pediatricians who can speak to the stages of adolescent brain development, and how decision-making is key to the growing autonomy teens need. At PPSNE, we know that, whether we like it or not, teens make decisions all the time about their sexual behavior and they need information about what to do if, as a result, they believe they need help.

Planned Parenthood has long advocated for comprehensive health education in our public schools and, in particular, for age appropriate, medically accurate sex education. While Connecticut has an excellent "Framework for Healthy and Balanced Living"—guidelines from the State Department of Education--- all too often our schools lack the time in the school day and the experienced faculty to implement this framework and deliver important lessons on health in all of its aspects, and human sexuality in specific.

Simply stated, the health literacy of American young people is poor. While after school programs or those based in a church or community center can sometimes be useful for a small number of youth, more *public school based* comprehensive health education is necessary if we are to reach most youth and combat the epidemics of diabetes and obesity in the news every day. And comprehensive sex education is one way of making sure that teens have all the tools they need, both to say no to sexual activity and to access information about contraception if they choose to be sexually active.

We also know that the pipeline of qualified teachers is one of the impediments to delivery of health lessons: going forward, young health and PE teachers graduating from our public universities must become dually certified in both physical education and health education in order to be most useful to a school district.

Planned Parenthood would also like to join those health professionals who support the current Connecticut statutory approach to confidential health care for youth, both in and outside of

school based health centers. As you will have heard from others today, our State's policy has long reflected an understanding of the basic public health principle of patient-provider confidentiality as necessary to the timely treatment of health conditions. We stand in strong support of existing laws that balance the needs and rights of youth with the concerns of their parents, that attempt to foster communication without making mandatory parental involvement itself the very barrier that prevents care.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee as you learn more about our State's public health infrastructure as it relates to youth. While youth are not Planned Parenthood's primary patients, it is our mission to protect the right of ALL individuals to manage their own fertility and sexual health, and ensure access to the services, education and information to realize that right.