



## **Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

### **Statement of The Woodhull Freedom Federation Assessing Domestic Abstinence-Only Programs April 23, 2008**

#### **In Support of Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

Very few Congressional hearings are as important to the health of our children as this hearing. The question presented here is nothing less than whether young Americans will live or die. We live in an era in which sexuality can be practiced in a way that is safe or unsafe. Unsafe sex practices pose a very real threat of contracting a disease that is, for the majority of those infected, still fatal. Even under the best of circumstances, a young American who engages in sex without an adequate understanding, both of the risks and of the steps that can be taken to reduce those risks, may face an entire lifetime of difficult measures necessary to manage an ever-present life-threatening illness.

We are pleased that the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform of the U.S. House of Representatives continues to analyze the failure of the abstinence-only until marriage educational fiasco. It is well-known that these programs are of little value to sexually active teens that they discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. These initiatives also discriminate against all youth in such programs who are in nontraditional families, including single-parent households or those whose parents are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

This Committee will almost certainly hear wise advice that government – at the federal, state and local levels – has a responsibility to provide effective comprehensive sexuality education that leads to healthy, positive sexual beings in our nation. You may also hear the same hysterical falsehoods that have allowed the government to continue to fund a program that has been proven to be ineffective. You may be told by some that providing comprehensive sexuality information will encourage young people to engage in sex where otherwise they would not do so. You know, each of you, that is wrong. Your own experiences in your own neighborhoods, confirmed by all reputable studies, shows that peer pressures, hormonal development and the general culture in which we live – not the



availability of comprehensive sexuality education – is what motivates young people to become sexually active. In short, whether you or we like it or not, a high percentage of teenagers are today sexually active. They are vulnerable to disease and ultimately death if they are not educated as to the risks and as to the measures they can take to protect themselves.

You may also hear from witnesses that comprehensive sexuality education is entirely the responsibility of parents, not schools. To accept that argument ignores the reality that the best way to educate our youth is through a partnership between the homes and schools, providing and reinforcing information and resources. It also ignores the reality that while some parents are conscientious about sexuality education, many are not. Many parents either decline, or are too uncomfortable, to talk to their children honestly about sex and sexuality. Many are themselves misinformed or ignorant of basic sexual facts and in denial that their child needs such information. Thus, despite even the best of intentions, many parents are unprepared to do sex education with their children beyond an important but insufficient sharing of their values and expectations.

Comprehensive sexuality education in schools has the potential to teach and provide access to vital, life-saving information in a peer environment where students may be more comfortable asking questions and seeking relevant answers to those questions. It is an easier, more reliable way to provide age and developmentally appropriate comprehensive access to information to children and teens. It prepares them for situations they may likely face, instructs them how to make safe, informed decisions, and can help in understanding differing forms of sexual expression, gender identity and sexuality.

You will also, we fear, hear testimony that it is “bad policy” or even “immoral” to teach comprehensive sexuality education, a program that, by its very definition, censors important sources of sexuality information – making it more likely that young people will take risks, increasing chances of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and contribution to the emotional harm to many adolescents. You will probably hear that people of a certain religious view will rise up and cast you out of office if you authorize or condone comprehensive, scientific sexuality education. It is a sad fact that this puritanical – and, for young people, deadly – ideology has struck fear into the hearts of legislators in many parts of this country. We encourage you to stand resolute in the face of those who would suppress vital information, recognizing that the suppression of information about our bodies and our sexuality and, indeed, our health and lives, is not the way to protect future generations of Americans – our children!



## **Summary**

The Woodhull Freedom Federation is devoted to advocating the proposition that sexual freedom is a fundamental human right. For adults, this means the freedom to engage in the consensual sexual activity and sexual expression of their choice. For children, it means that government – and society as a whole – must provide the tools to develop the understanding that is necessary to make responsible sexual decisions – understanding of the risks of sexuality as well as the joys; understanding of the responsibilities to ones' partner as well as the rights to engage in consensual practices; and understanding of the ways to protect yourself and your partner from disease and harm.

Comprehensive, realistic sexuality education and access to information is essential to enable young people to make decisions and protect themselves. Sexuality education courses should have universally consistent, accurate curricula. Courses should be mandatory, and comprehensive, inclusive sexuality education (including abstinence information) should be taught. Sexuality education should begin early and be taught continuously throughout a child's education.

Access to any and all information regarding sexual health, sexuality, and sex is a fundamental right of young people. Sexuality education should also include diversity and acceptance. Regardless of differences in gender identity, sexual expression or orientation, sexuality education must convey thorough, accurate and unbiased sexual-health information.

People – all people - have a right to access any and all sexual health information, as well as services and materials needed to express their sexuality in an affirmative way. Sexuality education needs to be an integral method of access to accurate and honest sexual information.

Respectfully submitted,

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