



**Testimony in Support of Funding the Healthy Relationships Education and Supports for Foster Youth Program**

**Submitted by: Grayson Dempsey, Executive Director  
NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon, NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon Foundation**

February 26, 2019

Co-Chairs Nosse and Beyer, and Members of the Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee:

As advocates for reproductive justice, NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon understands the importance of ensuring that all young people have access to both sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sex education. On behalf of NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon, I respectfully request that the committee fund the Healthy Relationships Education and Supports for Foster Youth program, included within the proposed budget for the Childhood Welfare program (HB 5026) at a cost of \$1.7 million General Fund.

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon is dedicated to developing and sustaining a constituency that uses the political process to guarantee every woman the right to make personal decisions regarding the full range of reproductive choices, including preventing unintended pregnancy, bearing healthy children, and choosing legal abortion. Everyone—regardless of their circumstances—deserves the tools to be able to make those personal decisions when and if they are ready.

While Oregon is a leader in its comprehensive sex education laws and standards, there is still work to do. At the Oregon Foster Youth Connection Policy Conference in 2018, foster youth across the state gathered to voice their need for inclusive, comprehensive, culturally-sensitive, and trauma-informed sexual health education that addresses their lived experiences and helps them learn about sexual health. They also identified the need for additional tools and access to resources that will help them cultivate healthy relationships. This includes information needed to identify the “red flags” of abusive relationships and recognize sex trafficking dynamics.

Adolescence is a formative period of physical and personal change and growth. For youth in foster care, those social, emotional, and physical changes occur in settings where they may lack the support of a trusted adult, awareness of programs and resources, or the autonomy to make decisions about their wellbeing. Furthermore, foster youth experiences high rates of adverse childhood events (ACEs) and

may be impacted by histories of trauma. Youth in foster care also have a higher risk for unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, interpersonal violence, and may be targets or victims of sex trafficking. Yet, youth in foster care often face the greatest barriers to accessing both sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sex education.

Access to information, resources, and quality health care is a fundamental right and should not depend on who we are or where we live. All young people deserve to have the information they need to make safe and healthy choices. Sex education is widely supported by a majority of Americans, the American Medical Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Access to comprehensive sex education not only improves health outcomes, studies have shown that it can contribute to preventing sexual violence and gender-based discrimination, as well as improve socio-emotional wellbeing by teaching skills related to building safe and positive relationships, understanding and accepting difference, challenging bias, resolving conflict, making healthy decisions, and defining and promoting enthusiastic consent practices that empower youth to claim their right to bodily autonomy.

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon supports the funding of Healthy Relationships Education and Supports for Foster Youth as part of the Child Welfare program (HB 5026) because youth in foster care deserve to have the knowledge and skills to build healthy futures with safe relationships.

Sincerely,

Grayson Dempsey  
Executive Director