
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

February 26, 2019

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

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon respectfully requests that the committee fund the Healthy Relationships Education and Supports for Foster Youth program, included within the proposed Child Welfare budget (HB 5026) at a cost of \$1.7 million General Fund.

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 about health care resources; or the autonomy to make decisions about their well-being. Furthermore, these youth have high rates of adverse childhood events (ACEs) and are impacted by histories of trauma. Youth in foster care are twice as likely to have an unintended pregnancy than their peers;¹ are tested and treated for STIs at more than four times the national average;² and have a higher risk for interpersonal violence and being targets or victims of sex trafficking. Yet, this vulnerable population faces the greatest barriers to accessing the sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sex education that could improve their health outcomes and ability to recognize the “red flags” of targeting, grooming, and abusive relationships.

While Oregon is a leader in its comprehensive sex education laws and standards, foster youth from around the state convened at the Oregon Foster Youth Connection Policy Conference in 2018 and voiced 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 and accessing health resources. They expressed a very strong desire to learn about healthy relationships and identifying the “red flags” of abusive relationships. Developing those socio-emotional learning skills and mental health concepts is integral to recognizing sex trafficking dynamics. The proposed Healthy Relationships Education and Supports for Foster Youth program provides an opportunity to understand and support youth in foster care through comprehensive sex education that is informed by their feedback and needs. Such a program would improve health outcomes, facilitate their transition into healthy adulthood, and empower youth to make appropriate sexual health and relationship choices for themselves.

Access to information, resources, and quality health care is a fundamental right and shouldn't 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 well-being by teaching skills related to building safe and positive relationships, understanding and accepting difference, challenging bias, resolving conflict, making health decisions, and defining and promoting enthusiastic consent practices that empower youth to claim their right to bodily autonomy.³

Planned Parenthood Advocates of 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,
Emily McLain
Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

¹ <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/BTB24-2J-10.pdf>

² Becker, M. G., & Barth, R. P. (2000). Power through choices: The development of a sexuality education curriculum for youths in out-of-home care. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program*, 79(3), 269-282.

³ <https://siecus.org/sex-ed-is-a-vehicle-for-social-change/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=cc47263d-030b-4433-bd66-fd1e3fd26f45>