



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

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Chair Keny-Guyer and Members of the House Committee on Human Services and Housing:

As advocates for reproductive justice, NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon understands the importance of ensuring that all young people have access to comprehensive sex education and are taught about consent and healthy relationships. On behalf of NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon, I respectfully request that the committee pass H.B. 3180 to ensure that educators are able to teach students the necessary tools to engage in safe and healthy relationships.

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. 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.

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. As they grow up, young people face important decisions about relationships, sexuality, and sexual behavior. The decisions they make can impact their health and well-being for the rest of their lives. Young people have the right to lead healthy

lives, and our state has the responsibility to prepare youth by providing them with comprehensive sexual health education that gives them the tools they need to make healthy decisions. Comprehensive sexual health education must do more. It must provide young people with honest, age-appropriate information and skills necessary to help them take personal responsibility for their health and overall wellbeing.

Maintaining a healthy relationship requires skills many young people are never taught – including positive communication, conflict management, and negotiating decisions around sexual activity. A lack of these skills can lead to unhealthy and even violent relationships among youth: one in 10 high school students has experienced physical violence from a dating partner in the past year.¹ Sex education should include understanding and identifying healthy and unhealthy relationship patterns; effective ways to communicate relationship needs and manage conflict; and strategies to avoid or end an unhealthy relationship.²

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon supports H.B. 3180, as an important first step in providing adequate funding for the development of curricula and educator training for instructional requirements that relate to child sexual abuse prevention, human sexuality education, teen dating violence and domestic violence, because all Oregon youth, regardless of their circumstances, deserve to have the tools to make important sexual health decisions that will impact them for the rest of their lives.

¹ Dating Matters: Strategies to Promote Healthy Teen Relationships. Atlanta: Center for Disease Control and Prevention; 2013.

² National Sexual Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12. A Special Publication of the Journal of School Health. 2012: 6-9. <http://www.futureofsexed.org/documents/josh-fose-standards-web.pdf>. Accessed October 2, 2013.