

REAL SEX ED SAVES LIVES!

Planned Parenthood in Virginia

Abstinence-only programs employ fear, shame, guilt and misinformation to discourage teens from engaging in sexual activity. While any good sex education program is rooted in abstinence, the reality is that many teens are already sexually active and need information about responsible decision-making, disease-prevention and contraception. Decisions about sexuality education programs are made at the national, state and local levels. It's time to demand accountability, responsibility and REAL sex ed from decision-makers at all levels of government!

Congress has spent over \$1.5 billion in taxpayer funds on unproven, ineffective abstinence-only education since 1996 with little oversight or evaluation.

- There are currently three federal funding streams for abstinence-only programs and none for comprehensive sexuality education.
- In 1996, Congress established an eight-point federal definition of “abstinence education” to guide the granting process, including the requirement that programs “teach that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.”
- A report released by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) in 2004 found that the curricula used by *more than two-thirds* of government-funded abstinence-only programs contain misleading or inaccurate information about contraception, genetics, sexually transmitted infections and abortion.
- To date, 23 states and the District of Columbia have rejected Title V abstinence-only funds, including Virginia.
- In April 2008, a report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 1 in 4 teenage girls (more than three million) have a sexually transmitted infection. This report underscores the need for programs that keep teens healthy-by including information about abstinence as well as contraception, healthy communication, responsible decision making, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

Virginia has Family Life Education guidelines, but they are not mandated.

- The guidelines include information about contraception and safer sex practices, but local school divisions have the option of using a locally developed program, skipping certain topics (i.e. contraception) or neglecting Family Life Education altogether.
- The FLE guidelines are subject to amendment by the Virginia General Assembly: in recent years, bills have been introduced to strengthen the guidelines to include information about Emergency Contraception, as well as legislative attempts to include biased and inaccurate information. In 2009, a bill requiring Virginia's Family Life Education materials to be medically accurate failed to pass the House of Delegates Education Committee (5-4).
- A 2006 survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Education found that 82% of local school districts' FLE programs are abstinence-based and 14% are abstinence-only. In these localities, when pregnancy and STIs are presented, abstinence is the only form of prevention discussed. Only 3% of districts do not offer FLE at all.
- In 2009, Planned Parenthood helped pass HB 1980, Parents Right to Know. This bill requires that school districts notify parents and distribute a summary of the Family Life Education curriculum before instruction begins. This bill will increase parental involvement in FLE instruction and parent-teen communication about subjects like responsible decision-making, postponing sexual involvement, and the prevention of unintended pregnancy and STIs.

What's the Solution? Congress should pass the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act, introduced by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA). The REAL Act is commonsense legislation that would authorize federal funding for comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education.

- The REAL Act would create a grant program administered by the Department of Health and Human Services that would fund comprehensive sex education programs in schools nationwide.
- Currently, no federal program is dedicated to supporting comprehensive sex education.