

**AAUW Capitol Hill Lobby Corps
Responsible Education About Life Act (H.R. 1551)
October 8, 2009**

I. SUMMARY

Message: Cosponsor the Responsible Education About Life Act (H.R. 1653).

This month is the Sex Education Month of Action. AAUW and coalition partners are participating to increase awareness about the dire need for comprehensive sex education, now. The REAL Act will establish a federal funding stream for age-appropriate, medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education. This includes informing students on the values and benefits of abstinence, as well as about contraception and pregnancy and infection prevention. Teens need honest and accurate information in order to help them protect themselves and lead healthy lives.

II. BACKGROUND

There are currently three federal programs that fund abstinence-only education: the Adolescent Family Life Act, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (more commonly known as welfare/TANF) where abstinence only programs are referred to as Title V programs, and Community-Based Abstinence (formerly known as the Special Projects of Regional and National Significance—Community-Based Abstinence Education).¹ These programs date back to 1981 when the U.S. Office of Population Affairs began administering the AFLA. During the 1996 welfare reform, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was added to the list of programs, which was supplemented once more, in 2000, by the Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) program. All told, since their inception, abstinence-only education has received over \$1.5 billion of public money.²

What is Abstinence-Only Education?

Programs that receive federal money from PRWORA as well as from CBAE must adhere to eight guidelines.

THE FEDERAL DEFINITION FOR ABSTINENCE-ONLY PROGRAMS
Section 510(b) of Title V of the Social Security Act, P.L. 104-193
<i>For the purposes of this section, the term “abstinence education” means an educational or motivational program which:</i>
1. has as its exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological,

and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
2. teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children;
3. teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;
4. teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity;
5. teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;
6. teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;
7. teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances, and
8. teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.

Furthermore, abstinence-only programs are prohibited from discussing contraceptives except in the context of failure rates.³

AAUW's Concerns about Abstinence-Only Education

- Over 80 percent of abstinence-only curricula contain “false, misleading or distorted information about reproductive health.”⁴
- Abstinence-only programs have never been proven effective in delaying the onset of sexual activities of young people, and often result in riskier sexual behavior by teenagers.⁵
- Abstinence-only programs promote gender stereotypes as fact. For example, one workshop manual states, “Men sexually are like microwaves and women sexually are like crockpots...a woman is stimulated more by touch and romantic words. She is far more attracted by a man's personality while a man is stimulated by sight. A man is usually less discriminating about those to whom he is physically attracted.”⁶
- The U.S. is the only developed country with formal policies appropriating funds to abstinence-only programs.⁷
- Federally funded abstinence-only sex education blurs the line separating church and state through its religiously slanted teachings.⁸
- Abstinence-only programs contain medically inaccurate and biased language about HIV/AIDS⁹ and condoms.¹⁰

In addition, the U.S. Government Accountability Office issued a report in October 2006 that stated the efforts to ensure the scientific accuracy of abstinence-only education has been “limited.” GAO stated that this was because the Administration for Children and Families does not review the education materials used in abstinence-only education for

scientific accuracy, nor require the program administrators themselves to do a review of the material.¹¹ A recent federally-supported evaluation of abstinence-only programs found that they did not change teens' sexual behavior.¹²

With so much at stake, as well as the use of taxpayer dollars, it is imperative that sufficient research and oversight be done on these programs to ensure that children are being provided with complete and medically accurate information.

What is Comprehensive Sex Ed?

These programs include age-appropriate, medically accurate information on a myriad of topics related to sexuality including human development, relationships, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention. Comprehensive sexuality education includes discussions of critical issues of self esteem and age appropriate behaviors, for both boys and girls. In the best curriculums, abstinence is always stressed, but information with regards to delaying sexual initiation and activity, as well as ways to deal with peer pressure on the issue.

The Benefits of Comprehensive Sex Ed

In comparison to the results yielded by abstinence-only programs, comprehensive sexuality education has demonstrated positive results such as delayed initiation of sex, reduced frequency of sex, and increased contraceptive use.¹³ Currently there are no federally funded programs dedicated to comprehensive sexuality education programs.

AAUW supports the right of every woman to obtain medically accurate information about and access to safe and comprehensive reproductive health services. AAUW opposes federally funded programs that limit young people's information and choices by promoting only abstinence. Such programs are critical in helping to combat teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

The Administration is Listening

The Obama administration proposed, in its FY2010 Budget, the elimination of abstinence-only sex education. Both the House and the Senate listened. The House passed their Labor, Health, Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill in July, zeroing out abstinence-only funding and funding an evidence based teen pregnancy prevention initiative. This initiative, as drafted, falls short of the gold standard of comprehensive sex education as proposed in the REAL Act because it fails to also target the high levels of STI and HIV incidence, and instead focuses solely on pregnancy prevention. The Senate is also considering a similar proposal in their, yet to be passed, LHHS Appropriations bill. Fortunately, there is still time to iron out the details of the initiative and AAUW supports the REAL Act as the model.

III. TALKING POINTS

- The Center for Disease Control has found that one in four (26%) female adolescents in the United States has one of the most common sexually transmitted infections.¹⁴
- There is a significant correlation between poverty and adolescent pregnancy.¹⁵ Adolescent childbearing makes it increasingly difficult to attain work experience, secondary or post-secondary education, and thus economic security.¹⁶
- Comprehensive sex education does not increase sexual activity. Studies indicate it can help young people delay sexual activity and increase contraceptive use among those who are sexually active.¹⁷
- There is currently NO federal funding stream for comprehensive sex ed. While some people may be eligible for the information and services provided by groups who receive Title X money, namely safety-net health care providers, there is no federal money for comprehensive sex education in schools.
- Comprehensive sexuality education has overwhelming support from the medical community. Over 140 national organizations support comprehensive sexuality education, including: American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, National Education Association, National Medical Association, National School Boards Association, and Society for Adolescent Medicine.¹⁸
- Almost half of the states have turned down the abstinence only money they are eligible for under Title V because they agree, it doesn't work!¹⁹

WHAT THIS BILL WOULD ACCOMPLISH

This bipartisan, pro-prevention legislation will provide federal funding for comprehensive sex education that will include discussions of critical issues of self esteem and age-appropriate behaviors, for boys and girls, as well as stressing abstinence, but also providing information with regards to delaying sexual initiation and activity, as well as ways to deal with peer pressure on the issue. It is a program that:

- Is age-appropriate and medically accurate;
- Stresses the value of abstinence while not ignoring young people who have had or are having sex;
- Provides accurate information about the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives and barrier methods used a) as a means to prevent

pregnancy, and b) to reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV;

- Encourages family communication between parent and child about sexuality;
- Teaches young people the skills to make responsible decisions about sexuality, including how to avoid unwanted verbal, physical, and sexual advances and how to avoid making verbal, physical, and sexual advances that are not wanted by the other party;
- Explores the components of healthy relationships, including the prevention of dating and sexual violence;
- Teaches young people how alcohol and drug use can affect responsible decision making; and
- Does not teach or promote religion.

IV. STATUS

Sponsor: Rep Lee, Barbara (D-CA-9)

Status: Introduced 3/17/2009 and referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Senate companion bill, S. 611, has 13 cosponsors.

Cosponsors: 90

[Rep Abercrombie, Neil](#) [HI-1] - 4/21/2009
[Rep Ackerman, Gary L.](#) [NY-5] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Baldwin, Tammy](#) [WI-2] - 5/6/2009
[Rep Berkley, Shelley](#) [NV-1] - 6/25/2009
[Rep Berman, Howard L.](#) [CA-28] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Blumenauer, Earl](#) [OR-3] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Brady, Robert A.](#) [PA-1] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Braley, Bruce L.](#) [IA-1] - 7/31/2009
[Rep Capps, Lois](#) [CA-23] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Carnahan, Russ](#) [MO-3] - 5/12/2009
[Rep Carson, Andre](#) [IN-7] - 6/2/2009
[Rep Castor, Kathy](#) [FL-11] - 3/18/2009
[Rep Clarke, Yvette D.](#) [NY-11] - 3/23/2009
[Rep Cohen, Steve](#) [TN-9] - 4/23/2009
[Rep Crowley, Joseph](#) [NY-7] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Cummings, Elijah E.](#) [MD-7] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Davis, Danny K.](#) [IL-7] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Davis, Susan A.](#) [CA-53] - 3/17/2009
[Rep DeFazio, Peter A.](#) [OR-4] - 6/25/2009
[Rep DeGette, Diana](#) [CO-1] - 4/23/2009
[Rep Delahunt, William D.](#) [MA-10] - 3/19/2009
[Rep DeLauro, Rosa L.](#) [CT-3] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Doyle, Michael F.](#) [PA-14] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Edwards, Donna F.](#) [MD-4] - 6/2/2009
[Rep Ellison, Keith](#) [MN-5] - 6/2/2009
[Rep Farr, Sam](#) [CA-17] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Fattah, Chaka](#) [PA-2] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Filner, Bob](#) [CA-51] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Giffords, Gabrielle](#) [AZ-8] - 3/19/2009

[Rep Gonzalez, Charles A.](#) [TX-20] - 5/7/2009
[Rep Green, Al](#) [TX-9] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Grijalva, Raul M.](#) [AZ-7] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Gutierrez, Luis V.](#) [IL-4] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Hastings, Alcee L.](#) [FL-23] - 5/6/2009
[Rep Heinrich, Martin](#) [NM-1] - 6/26/2009
[Rep Higgins, Brian](#) [NY-27] - 7/31/2009
[Rep Hinchey, Maurice D.](#) [NY-22] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Hirono, Mazie K.](#) [HI-2] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Honda, Michael M.](#) [CA-15] - 4/2/2009
[Rep Jackson, Jesse L., Jr.](#) [IL-2] - 3/23/2009
[Rep Johnson, Henry C. "Hank," Jr.](#) [GA-4] - 6/8/2009
[Rep Kennedy, Patrick J.](#) [RI-1] - 4/27/2009
[Rep Kilpatrick, Carolyn C.](#) [MI-13] - 3/26/2009
[Rep Kucinich, Dennis J.](#) [OH-10] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Langevin, James R.](#) [RI-2] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Larsen, Rick](#) [WA-2] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Lewis, John](#) [GA-5] - 3/18/2009
[Rep Lowey, Nita M.](#) [NY-18] - 3/19/2009
[Rep Maloney, Carolyn B.](#) [NY-14] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Massa, Eric J. J.](#) [NY-29] - 6/2/2009
[Rep McCollum, Betty](#) [MN-4] - 3/17/2009
[Rep McDermott, Jim](#) [WA-7] - 3/17/2009
[Rep McGovern, James P.](#) [MA-3] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Meek, Kendrick B.](#) [FL-17] - 7/17/2009
[Rep Meeks, Gregory W.](#) [NY-6] - 3/23/2009
[Rep Miller, Brad](#) [NC-13] - 6/8/2009
[Rep Miller, George](#) [CA-7] - 3/23/2009
[Rep Moore, Dennis](#) [KS-3] - 6/8/2009

[Rep Nadler, Jerrold](#) [NY-8] - 5/6/2009
[Rep Napolitano, Grace F.](#) [CA-38] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Norton, Eleanor Holmes](#) [DC] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Olver, John W.](#) [MA-1] - 3/19/2009
[Rep Pastor, Ed](#) [AZ-4] - 4/27/2009
[Rep Payne, Donald M.](#) [NJ-10] - 4/2/2009
[Rep Polis, Jared](#) [CO-2] - 6/18/2009
[Rep Price, David E.](#) [NC-4] - 5/14/2009
[Rep Quigley, Mike](#) [IL-5] - 4/29/2009
[Rep Rothman, Steven R.](#) [NJ-9] - 5/21/2009
[Rep Rush, Bobby L.](#) [IL-1] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Ryan, Tim](#) [OH-17] - 6/18/2009
[Rep Sablan, Gregorio](#) [MP] - 5/6/2009
[Rep Sanchez, Linda T.](#) [CA-39] - 4/29/2009
[Rep Sarbanes, John P.](#) [MD-3] - 6/2/2009
[Rep Schakowsky, Janice D.](#) [IL-9] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Serrano, Jose E.](#) [NY-16] - 5/14/2009

[Rep Sestak, Joe](#) [PA-7] - 5/14/2009
[Rep Sherman, Brad](#) [CA-27] - 3/23/2009
[Rep Sires, Albio](#) [NJ-13] - 6/16/2009
[Rep Slaughter, Louise McIntosh](#) [NY-28] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Smith, Adam](#) [WA-9] - 3/23/2009
[Rep Stark, Fortney Pete](#) [CA-13] - 3/26/2009
[Rep Tierney, John F.](#) [MA-6] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Titus, Dina](#) [NV-3] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Tonko, Paul D.](#) [NY-21] - 4/27/2009
[Rep Wasserman Schultz, Debbie](#) [FL-20] - 3/17/2009
[Rep Watson, Diane E.](#) [CA-33] - 5/12/2009
[Rep Waxman, Henry A.](#) [CA-30] - 3/18/2009
[Rep Welch, Peter](#) [VT] - 5/7/2009
[Rep Woolsey, Lynn C.](#) [CA-6] - 3/30/2009
[Rep Wu, David](#) [OR-1] - 3/26/2009 [MD-4] - 5/21/2007

V. TARGETS:

VI. WHO TO ASK FOR:

Women's Issues LA

¹ Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States. (2007). *No More Money for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs*. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from <http://www.nomoremoney.org/history.html>.

² Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States. Fact Sheet: What the Research Says..... Retrieved April 2, 2008 from http://www.siecus.org/policy/research_says.pdf.

³ Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States. "No More Money for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs." (2005). Retrieved November 19, 2007, from <http://www.nomoremoney.org/reality.html>.

⁴ U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform—Minority Staff Special Investigations Division. (December 2004). *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*, prepared for Rep. Henry A. Waxman. Retrieved December 19, 2007, from <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf>.

⁵ Kirby, Douglas. (2007). *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Retrieved November 16, 2007, from http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/EA2007/EA2007_sum.pdf.

⁶ Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. (August 2005). *In Their Own Words: What Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs Say*. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from http://www.siecus.org/policy/in_their_own_words.pdf.

⁷ Boonstra, Heather. (February 2002). *Guttmacher Report on Public Policy. Teen Pregnancy: Trends and Lessons Learned*. Retrieved December 19, 2007, from <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/tgr/05/1/gr050107.pdf>.

⁸ American Civil Liberties Union. (August 2007). *Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs Censor Vital Health Care Information*. Retrieved December 19, 2007, from <http://www.aclu.org/reproductiverights/sexed/12670res20070822.html>.

⁹ U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform—Minority Staff Special Investigations Division. (December 2004). *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence-Only Education Programs*, prepared for Rep. Henry A. Waxman. Retrieved December 19, 2007, from <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20041201102153-50247.pdf>.

¹⁰Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. (August 2005). *In Their Own Words: What Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs Say*. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from http://www.siecus.org/policy/in_their_own_words.pdf.

¹¹Government Accountability Office. (October 2006). Abstinence Education: Efforts to Assess the Accuracy of and Effectiveness of Federally Funded Programs. *GAO Highlights*, GAO-07-87. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0787.pdf>.

¹²Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. *Impacts of Four Title V Section 510 Abstinence Education Programs*.

¹³Kirby, Douglas. (2007). *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Retrieved November 16, 2007, from http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/EA2007/EA2007_sum.pdf.

¹⁴Centers for Disease Control. Nationally Representative CDC Study Finds 1 in 4 Teenage Girls Has a Sexually Transmitted Disease. Retrieved April 2, 2008 from <http://www.cdc.gov/STDCConference/2008/media/release-11march2008.htm>.

¹⁵The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2005). *The 'What If' Project*. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from http://www.teenpregnancy.org/whycare/pdf/National_Press_Release.pdf.

¹⁶Klein, Jonathan D. and the Committee on Adolescence. (2005). Adolescent Pregnancy: Current Trends and Issues. *Pediatrics*, 116, 281-286. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/116/1/281.pdf>.

¹⁷Kirby, Douglas. (2007). *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Retrieved November 16, 2007, from http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/EA2007/EA2007_sum.pdf.

¹⁸Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States. (2007). *The National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education Coalition Members*. Retrieved December 19, 2007, from <http://www.siecus.org/pubs/fact/fact0005.html>. National Education Association. (2007). NEA 2007-2008 Resolutions, B-47 Sex Education. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from <http://www.nea.org/annualmeeting/raaction/images/2007-2008Resolutions.pdf>. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Our Mission. Retrieved November 19, 2007, from <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/about-us/our-mission.aspx>.

¹⁹Sexual Information and Education Council of the United States. Federal Abstinence Only-Until-Marriage Funding By State, Fiscal Year 2008. Retrieved October 8, 2009 from <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1159>.