



**Testimony of Corey Westover
Family Planning Program Manager
Community Healthcare Network
Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Health and the Committee on
Women's Issues
RE Oversight: Sex Education in NYC Schools
New York City Council Chambers
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Thank you, Chairman Dromm, Chairman Johnson, Chairwoman Cumbo, and members of the Committees for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. My name is Corey Westover and I am the Family Planning Program Manager at Community Healthcare Network. CHN has been in existence for over 30 years. Today we operate a network of 13 Federally Qualified Health Centers in the boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn, including a mobile health van and a school-based health center. We provide comprehensive services including primary care, behavioral health and social services, to over 85,000 individuals each year.

At CHN, we have a robust sexual and reproductive health program in which we provide clinical and educational services and counseling. As part of this program, we offer no-cost comprehensive sexuality education to schools and community-based organizations throughout NYC. So far in 2015, our skilled health educators have facilitated 575 workshops in 49 schools and organizations, reaching thousands of young people. We are very proud and excited to be reaching so many young people, but, we are doing the job of our public schools. Most of the public schools we work with reach out to us because they do not feel equipped to provide comprehensive sexuality education. This is because of a lack of staff training, discomfort with sexual health content, or a conflict in staff values.

For the last few years, I have provided education and counseling to patients in our health centers, as well as facilitated educational workshops for groups. I can tell you that young people need and want this education. One of the tools we use in the classroom is an anonymous question box, in which participants can safely ask questions about sexuality. For example, participants have asked some of these actual questions:

- My partner won't use a condom. Is it safe to use birth control the first time you have sex?
- Can you skip using a condom because you know your partner and you are clean?
- How do you know if you're ready to have sex?
- How do you know if your partner is the right person for you?

These questions can be shocking, amusing, and poignant. But they are honest, and they open up a space for meaningful, complicated conversations around sexual decision making and communication.

The Department of Education recommends that students receive sexual health education for part of a semester in middle school and for a full semester in high school. Unfortunately, many students are not receiving this bare minimum. There is currently no system of tracking sexual health education or services, and no system of tracking staff training. Inadequate sexual education in our public schools is not only disappointing, it is also dangerous. We cannot expect sexually active young people to make informed choices about their health without giving them the skills and information to do so. These bills will reinforce the idea that comprehensive sexuality education is critically important to healthy adolescent development.

On behalf of CHN, we fully support the New York City Council in passing the bills before you, which will require the Department of Education to monitor and evaluate the provision of sexuality education in our schools.

CHN is encouraged by the positive strides that the city is making to improve sexuality education in our classrooms, such as the recent memo allowing correct condom use to be demonstrated in classrooms. In addition to the three bills before you, CHN also recommends that Chancellor Carmen Fariña pass a Chancellor's Regulation requiring adherence to the National Sexuality Education Standards for all public school students, from kindergarten through 12th grade. Additionally, the Department of Education also needs to create a meaningful implementation plan for the National Sexuality Education Standards.

In closing, I strongly encourage the New York City Council to pass these bills which will enforce transparency in sexuality education, enabling young people to lead sexually healthy and responsible lives. Thank you for holding this hearing today.