

Invest in Comprehensive Sex Education

Support the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act

The statistics are alarming. Each year, 750,000 teens become pregnant.ⁱ Young people account for nearly 50 percent of all new sexually transmitted infections (STIs),ⁱⁱ with rates dramatically higher than that of teens in comparable European nations.ⁱⁱⁱ Teen pregnancy rates are far higher in the United States than in most developed countries.^{iv} Half of the new HIV infections in America each year occur among young people.^v

To address this public health crisis, Senators Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) introduced the Responsible Education About Life Act (S. 611/H.R. 1551), which would authorize the first federal funding stream dedicated to providing comprehensive, medically-accurate, age-appropriate sex education to our youth. Unlike failed abstinence-only programs, which are ineffective, wasteful, and even dangerous, comprehensive sex education programs give young people the information they need to make responsible decisions about their health and lives.

Comprehensive Sex Education Programs Give Young People Complete and Accurate Information

- Comprehensive sex education programs underscore the importance of abstinence and emphasize that it is the only guaranteed way to avoid many serious health consequences that can result from sex.
- In addition—and unlike abstinence-only programs—comprehensive sex education programs discuss the risks and advantages of contraceptive methods, give young people tools to help them avoid unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and help teens learn healthy decision-making and communication skills.

Comprehensive Sex Education Programs Promote Responsible Health Practices and Lead to Better Health Outcomes

- Numerous studies have found certain comprehensive sex education programs to be highly effective in delaying initiation of sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, reducing the incidence of unprotected sex and increasing condom usage among American youth, and providing other positive results.^{vi}
- Research has also shown that comprehensive sex education programs have led to reduced rates of teen pregnancies and/or births among participants.^{vii}

Comprehensive Sex Education Programs Provide Critical Information about Contraception and Other Basic Health Care

- Contraception is basic health care for women that reduces the incidence of maternal death, and prevents low birth weight babies and infant mortality.^{viii}
- Most women have the potential to become pregnant for over 30 years of their lives, and for approximately three-quarters of her reproductive life, the average woman is trying to postpone or avoid pregnancy.^{ix}
- A 2006 study found that 86 percent of the decline in teen pregnancy risk between 1995 and 2002 was linked to improved use of contraception among teens.^x
- Federally funded abstinence-only programs are expressly prohibited from providing any information to adolescents about the proper usage of contraceptives or their proven efficacy in preventing unintended pregnancy.^{xi} They are, however, specifically required to inform participants of contraceptive failure rates.^{xii}

Voters Strongly Support Comprehensive Sex Education

- A 2007 survey conducted by Hart Research Associates found that 76 percent of voters, including decisive majorities of Independents, Republicans, red-state voters, Catholics, Evangelicals, and seniors—*strongly support* teaching comprehensive sex education in public schools.^{xiii}

Leading Medical, Public Health, and Education Organizations Support Comprehensive Sex Education

- More than 140 national organizations support comprehensive sex education, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, American Association of School Administrators, the National School Boards Association, and the Society for Adolescent Medicine.^{xiv}

The National Women's Law Center urges Members of Congress to cosponsor the Responsible Education About Life Act and give young people the information and tools they need to make responsible decisions about their health and lives.

For more information, contact the National Women's Law Center at (202) 588-5180.

ⁱ Guttmacher Institute, *U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics: National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity*, (New York, NY: Guttmacher Institute, updated Sep. 2006), <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/2006/09/12/USTPstats.pdf>.

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- ⁱⁱ Hillard Weinstock, Stuart Berman, and Willard Cates, Jr., "Sexually Transmitted Diseases among American Youth: Incidence and Prevalence Estimates, 2000," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 36, no.1 (January/February 2004): 6-10.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sue Alford, Advocates for Youth, "Adolescents – At Risk for Sexually Transmitted Infections" (Jan. 2003), <http://advfy.nonprofitsoapbox.com/storage/advfy/documents/fssti.pdf>.
- ^{iv} Jacqueline E. Darroch, Jennifer J. Frost, and Susheela Singh, *Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior in Developed Countries: Can More Progress Be Made?* Occasional Report 3 (New York, NY: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2001).
- ^v Weinstock, Berman and Cates, Jr., "Sexually Transmitted Diseases," 2004. *Supra* note 2.
- ^{vi} Advocates for Youth, *Science & Success: Programs that Work to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infection, Second Edition* (Washington, DC: Advocates For Youth, 2008), <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/ScienceSuccess.pdf>.
- ^{vii} *Ibid.*
- ^{viii} Agustin Conde-Agudelo et al., "Birth Spacing and Risk of Adverse Perinatal Outcomes, A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 295, no.15 (Apr. 2006):1809-1823.
- ^{ix} Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Fulfilling the Promise: Public Policy and U.S. Family Planning Clinics* (New York, NY: AGI, Jan. 2000), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0KCT/is_2000_Jan_1/ai_n18611137.
- ^x John S. Santelli et al., "Explaining Recent Declines in Adolescent Pregnancy in the United States: the Contribution of Abstinence and Improved Contraceptive Use," *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no.1 (Jan. 2007): 150-156.
- ^{xi} Administration for Children and Families, "Funding Opportunity: Community-Based Abstinence Education," 70 Fed. Reg. 29,318, 29,320, 29,321, 29,324 (May 20, 2005); Administration for Children and Families, "Funding Opportunity: Community-Based Abstinence Education" (Jan. 26, 2006), 1, 7-8, 15, 27, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/pdf/HHS-2006-ACF-ACYF-AE-0099.pdf>.
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xiii} Peter D. Hart Research Associates, on behalf of the National Women's Law Center and Planned Parenthood, "Memorandum: Application of Research Findings" (April 2007), <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/7-12-07interestedpartiesmemo.pdf>.
- ^{xiv} SIECUS, "The National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education," <http://www.ncsse.org/organizations.html> (last accessed April 22, 2009).