



**WOMEN'S
CITY CLUB**
OF NEW YORK

Shaping Policy
Improving Lives

wccny.org

Testimony Submitted by
Marge Ives, WCC Member and Co-Chair of WCC Sex Education in NYC Public
Schools Task Force
Women's City Club of New York
October 27, 2015

Chairperson Dromm and members of the Committee on Education, Chairperson Johnson and members of the Committee on Health, and Chairperson Cumbo and members of the Committee on Women's Issue, thank you for this opportunity to advocate for much-needed reform for sex education in New York City public schools. I am Marge Ives, member of the Women's City Club of New York (WCC) and co-chair of WCC's Sex Education in NYC Public Schools Task Force. WCC is a century-old organization that shapes public policy through education, issue analysis, advocacy and civic participation.

WCC has long been at the forefront of improving standards for public school education as well as meeting the health needs of women and children throughout the five boroughs. In 1947 we conducted a survey of counseling and guidance services in public high schools and published a report with our findings; in 1988 we held a symposium on AIDS and its impact on children and their families in New York City; in 1995 WCC produced a 28-minute video tape promoting HIV/AIDS awareness among adolescents and young people that was incorporated into the sex education curriculum in public schools at that time; in 2011, WCC held a conference on improving the health of students by complying with the NYC Department of Education made of physical education. Most recently, WCC created the Sex Education in NYC Public Schools Task Force amid concern the 2011 sex education recommendation had not accomplished its intended goal: to provide comprehensive sex education to middle and high school students.

Today I am testifying on behalf of our 600-plus membership to ensure that New York City public schools are in fact providing that comprehensive sex education to our children.

The current rate of sexually transmitted infections among New York City youth is 25%. Nearly 20,000 15 to 19-year-olds in NYC have Chlamydia and nearly 3,300 have Gonorrhea. Moreover, although Herpes and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) are not reportable, they are exceedingly common. Overall, among sexually active adolescents, 1 in 4 will have an STD by age 21, with 1 in 2 sexually active people having an STD by age 25.¹

Further, HIV rates are sharply increasing among youth of color in New York City while decreasing for other age and racial groups. Between 2002 and 2011, the number of males between the ages of 15 and 24 living with HIV increased by 258%.ⁱⁱ It is imperative that young people receive comprehensive sex education in order to curb this dramatic increase in one of the deadliest infections our nation has ever seen.

Finally, there were 17,000 teen pregnancies in New York City in 2011, 87% of which were unintended.ⁱⁱⁱ The Bronx has seen the highest rates of teen pregnancies and abortions, as girls accounted for 86.4 of every 1,000 pregnancies – and nearly 1,800 babies.^{iv} As a member of a working group for the New York City Council's Young Women's Initiative, I have helped to assess the needs and disparities experienced by women and girls in New York City, through the lenses of educational attainment, preventative healthcare, and reproductive access. The teen pregnancy rates that we are currently seeing – as well as the rates of STIs and HIV – demonstrate the urgent need to educate our young women on safe sex practices. WCC commended the mayor and the New York City Department of Education when it issued its 2011 recommendation for a universal standard for sex education, as we felt it indicated the Department's commitment to meeting the needs of our youth.

Unfortunately, since that recommendation was issued, Women's City Club has failed to find qualitative and quantitative data to assess the recommendation's effectiveness. In our efforts to collect such data we have probed multiple access points, including a Freedom of Information Act request to the Department of Education. In addition to the individual efforts of the task force, WCC also worked as a member of the Sex Education Alliance of New York City (SEANYC) to advocate for the release of data related to the sex education recommendation. To date, neither the task force nor SEANYC has been able to obtain from the Department of Education any quantitative data on educator training, curricula utilized, or amount of classroom time devoted to sex education.

This lack of information regarding compliance of the 2011 sex education recommendation is concerning because without the accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance, schools may be sidestepping their responsibility of providing every middle and high school student vital health information.

The three bills being discussed at today's hearing seek to remedy this deficiency. By requiring schools to report on comprehensive sex education curriculum, instructor training, program evaluation, and reproductive health inquiries, the New York City Council will ensure that public schools are accountable to our young men and women. Without comprehensive sex education, our youngest New Yorkers are vulnerable to making adverse sexual health decisions that will result in negative long-term consequences. The

Women's City Club of New York supports legislation requiring the Department of Education to codify its original intent to provide comprehensive sex education. Further, we recommend that DoE expands sex education to grades kindergarten through 12th grade to ensure continuity and a fully comprehensive education.

Thank you.

-
- ⁱ New York State Department of Health. New York State Youth Sexual Health Plan. 2014. Accessed Online 23 October 2015. <https://www.health.ny.gov/community/youth/development/docs/2014_nys_youth_sexual_health_plan.pdf>.
- ⁱⁱ Ibid ⁱ
- ⁱⁱⁱ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. "Health Department Data Shows Steady Decline In Teen Pregnancy Rate." May 8, 2013. Accessed Online 23 October 2015. <<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/pr2013/pr012-13.shtml>>.
- ^{iv} Cunningham, Jennifer. "Pregnancy and abortion rates among Bronx teens is highest in the city, new report says." March 3, 2014. New York Daily News: New York, NY.