

Kim Hardesty
Chillicothe, Ohio

Testimony to the State of Ohio Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform
January 25, 2016

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Seitz, Ranking member Yuko, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on House Bill 294.

My name is Kim Hardesty and I live in Chillicothe. I work with foster care and adjudicated youth in southern Ohio through the Personal Responsibility Education Program—also known as PREP—for Planned Parenthood. I'm an educator and a trainer, and it's my privilege to work with the kids other people have given up on over the years.

Seven of the top 15 Ohio counties with the highest teen pregnancy rates are in the area I provide education: Adams, Athens, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Pike and Ross counties. This is Southern Ohio.

These young people are some of the most at-risk. These teens tend to take more risks sexually and engage in other risky behaviors than other kids their age. The statistics from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy are staggering:

- Young women in foster care are two-and-a-half times more likely to become pregnant.
- Half of the young men aging out of the system report having gotten someone pregnant, compared to 19 percent of their peers.
- The child welfare costs of the children born to teens in foster care account for a quarter of the total public spending related to teen childbearing.

The same can be said for the Juvenile Justice System, which serves many of the same youth.

Over the five years this program spans, Planned Parenthood will provide services to more than 7,000 young people in more a third of the state. The adults in the foster care and juvenile justice systems are being trained by us as well to ensure they can deliver the same education programs once our time with them has ended, creating sustainability with this population.

The program isn't just about comprehensive sex education - The teens learn about healthy relationships (which most of them have not been exposed to). We cover positive self-esteem, relationship dynamics, friendships, and dating; financial literacy in which we learn budgeting and money management skills; and educational and career success (we even do mock interviews). We truly want them to succeed when it's time for them to be on their own—not just with their healthcare but with their lives overall.

And we don't do this work alone. We have worked diligently to build a coalition of partners across the state, within each region we serve, to ensure that we're meeting the needs of the youth and the adults who work with them. We have built an entire network of people to support these teens and make PREP successful. We have earned their trust and their respect. Taking this work away from us will require starting from scratch. A new agency would have to rebuild everything we've already spent time and resources to build.

Dismantling this successful program Planned Parenthood has established is a disservice to my colleagues and the teens we serve. We are experts in the field of sexual and reproductive health. We provide medically accurate information to those whom we teach.

Before you defund us, get to know our work. Meet the people we serve. Don't just casually discard our program.