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Testimony to the State of Ohio Senate Committee on Government Oversight and Reform
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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.

I am Erica Klang, Health Educator at Planned Parenthood Southwest Ohio. I would like to share why I decided to pursue a career in sex education. I went to high school in Clark County, specifically Springfield Ohio. In 2008 I took my required health class. As we were getting closer to the “sexual health” lessons, I started to get excited. I had so many questions. I knew OF birth control, but how did it work? What were these “condoms” that I saw in movies and floating around at concerts I’ve been to? How did they work? Well I didn’t get to learn about any of that. I got to learn that marriage is the best foundation to a relationship. I got to learn that if you have sex before you’re married, that your relationship is unsteady and will fail. I was given a shirt that said “Pants! Keep them on!” I left health class almost every day in tears. I was betrayed. What about my relationship right now? How can it be good, even if it is not marriage? I’d always been on the fence about getting married, what if I never wanted to?

As the week of “sex ed” continued, I started to notice that everyone at my table and the tables around me were not paying attention. When I talked to my table after class we all realized that we’ve all had sex before! So all of this information was not relevant, or needed for us. The first day she taught us that sex before marriage makes your house unsteady - so we were doomed forever.

Fast forward to my four glorious years at THE Ohio State University (Go Bucks!), where I really found myself. I took an intro to Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies class, and someone finally told me I was worth something even without a man in my life. I was so happy about all this knowledge I was gaining and all the ways I could help others, I wanted to share this with my partner. So I told him all about my new dream of being a Sex Ed teacher. Travelling to schools to talk about ways to be happy about who you are. Being the person I needed to hear from when I was 12 and my body changing before others. Do you know what he told me? He told me that “I don’t think you’d be very good at that, you get too nervous talking in front of people.” This was someone that I loved, that I cared for, that I trusted. So I took that comment and decided to go another way.

It was approaching my 20th birthday before a friend told me I deserved better than someone who put me down, made me feel guilty for hanging out with my friends, and who made me feel like I owed him something for buying me dinner. I was almost out of my teenage years and no one told me that I deserved to be treated well in a relationship.

After that relationship ended, I started to think back to a time when I should have learned this. It was 2008, in health class, before I let this relationship go far into 2013. I was re-enraged. I realized I put my dream of being a sex educator in to an unreachable goal. But here I am. A Health Educator at Planned Parenthood, being the person I needed when I was young.

While getting my feet under me at my new job, I was able to shadow a fellow educator teach our Healthy Relationships curriculum. This work is able to be done with our VAWA funding – a program that will be in jeopardy should HB 294 become the law. We taught them how to communicate to your partner about boundaries. We taught them that at any point during a behavior, you have the right to stop it. We taught them that everyone deserves to feel happy in our relationships.

It took me getting a job at Planned Parenthood to finally learn what a healthy relationship looks like. At Planned Parenthood, we teach young people how to be healthy adults. If this funding is pulled, where will it go? To places like the one that taught me to keep my pants on? Places that led me to stay in an unhealthy situation because I was told I was a piece of tape, and the more people I was with I would be less bonded with them?

I went to High School in Clark County. The estimated teen pregnancy rate in Clark County (in 2010) is 40.1 out of 1,000. But it is my job to help lower that number and hopefully create more successful, healthy adults to contribute to Clark County. I run a teen clinic where I get to be the person these teens can come to with questions about anything. I get to meet teens where they are and give them the most helpful non-judgmental information that they want, need and deserve.

While you are voting on this bill, try to remember the teens in your district. These teens need people like us to look out for them, to allow them to grow up to be successful adults. They need *all* the available information in order to make the best choices for them. Because in my opinion, a choice made without all the information, isn't a choice at all. Trust the teens in your district to make healthy choices by allowing us to continue to provide some of the best education services out there. Thank you.