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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 Government Oversight and Reform committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on Senate Bill 214.

My name is Elizabeth Lococo and I'm from Hocking County. Today, I'm against SB214. I am a certified Master Trainer for the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) for 13 counties in Southeast Ohio. More importantly, I have been a community member of Southeast Ohio for almost 6 years. I choose to teach the PREP program because I saw, first hand, the need for sexual education and independent living skills for the youth within these communities. My educational background introduced me to the population I'm proud to interact with each day. My work with youth and families through children services and guardian et litem internships inspired me to be a part of the educational platform that was missing within these communities. The PREP program meets four of the eleven state mandated requirements for youth in the social service systems: career and educational planning, financial literacy, healthy relationships and sexual health.

The PREP program is taught with evidence based curriculum and uses a train the trainer model. I work with Juvenile Justice and Foster care agencies educating youth ages 14-19. The 19 lesson program is strictly regulated by the Ohio Department of Health. - the same department that choose Planned Parenthood out of other agencies to be the best fit to deliver this evidence based program. The numbers don't lie about the need for sexual education and living skills in Ohio, especially the rural population of Southeast Ohio and I believe that we have proven our worth. We have made those connections with agencies, trained 103 of direct line staff, and built relationships with approximately 450 adolescents we've been able to touch.

The 19 lessons include: Healthy Relationships 1 & 2, Pregnancy Risk, HIV/STDs Risk, Abstinence, Refusals, Using Refusal Skills, Delay Tactics, Avoiding High Risk Situations, Getting and Using Protection, Financial Literacy 1 & 2, Career Building Skills 1 & 2, Knowing and Talking about Protection, Skills Integration, Preventing HIV and other STD's and HIV Risk Behaviors, Implementing Protections from STD and Pregnancy, and Sticking with Abstinence and Protection.

I see such an impact with the youth going through this program. Of the 19 lessons I teach, I firmly believe the healthy relationship lesson is a key proponent to the program's success. The youth I work with don't always have the opportunity to see the qualities of a healthy relationship. Within these lessons we talk about good communication. I love seeing a change in the youth's thinking when we go over the difference between virginity and abstinence, and all the reasons why youth may want to remain abstinent in order to reach their future goals. Comprehensively, I truly enjoy increasing their knowledge on STD's and the risks. It's important that adolescents are fully aware of all the birth control options that are available to them, the pros and cons associated, and where they can access them.

The lessons that are just as important include teaching about delay tactics and refusal skills providing them with the planning skills to make smarter decisions. I truly think the financial literacy and career building lesson are fundamental to forming productive citizens. High school courses do not cover creating a budget or understanding the difference between gross and net pay, or even understand taxes from their paychecks as the financial literacy lesson practices. There are also no high school classes that teach adolescents where to look for jobs, how to write resumes, cover letters, reference sheets, and thank you notes. The career building lessons goes over all of that and how to prepare and handle job interviews. All the lessons are practiced through interactive role play that helps to reinforce the concepts contained in each portion of the PREP program.

I am advocating for the work that I and my fellow educators do – I am advocating for the young women and men have been and continue to be positively impacted by the PREP. These young people want and deserve to be respected, listened to and educated. PREP allows them to do that. Taking away the funding for the PREP takes away an adolescent's second chance at forming the skills to become a productive citizen within our communities.