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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.

My name is Kristin Freeman and I am Health Educator with Planned Parenthood. Much of my job is funded by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) – I teach violence prevention and comprehensive sexuality education to young people, including those in juvenile justice facilities and in the foster care system.

As many of you here might also say, I went into this job to make a difference in people's lives. No one gets into education or social work for the accolades or bonuses. We go into it because we genuinely care about people. My passion is educating young people, particularly adolescents. I believe that young people are the solution to many of our societal problems - not the cause.

When teaching violence prevention classes, I have an anonymous question box available. The students can ask me anything and I promise to answer it, as long as it's respectful. Here are some real questions from real students: How do I help my mom get out of an abusive relationship? How do I tell my girlfriend I am not ready to have sex? How do I tell my partner it hurts when they call me a slut?

We might not think of these questions coming from young people we know – relationship violence only happens to other people, right? But these questions are from three different schools in Montgomery County. The schools vary in racial, ethnic, and socio-economic status, but the students all have the same questions and concerns. And they're not alone. According to the Youth Risk Behavioral Survey released every two years by the CDC, we know that 1 in 10 U.S. teens report experiencing sexual violence in their dating relationship. Without programs funded by VAWA, many of them never hear the message I am there to deliver: You deserve to be in a healthy relationship. Your body is your own. You have the power to stop violence. You have the right to a society that supports trust and respect in relationships, over ego, violence, and deep-seeded misogyny.

Who here is aware that 26% of female foster youth report being pregnant before the age of 17, and 48.2% become pregnant by age 19, compared to a 7% pregnancy rate for teens 15-19 years overall? This population of young women are at a higher risk for homelessness, incarceration, and dropping out of school. Imagine for a moment being a young person who is without a stable home. No mother or father to make sure you get home okay after school. No one to make sure you even *get* to school. No one to make you a PB & J, comfort you when you complain about a classmate, listen to your dreams of going into politics. And beyond that, no one to tell you what to expect when you get your first menstruation cycle. Or have your first date. Or get your heart broken by a partner. Or your ribs broken by a partner. Imagine finding a social worker who'd been trained by Planned Parenthood to administer PREP. This person listens to you, without judgment, about what you've been through. Answers your questions about your body. Details the characteristics of a healthy relationship and provides warning signs for a potential unhealthy relationship. Empowers you with information.

If VAWA and PREP are no longer provided by Planned Parenthood, young people will continue to have sex. They will continue to see and be a part of unhealthy relationships. They will continue to have questions about how their bodies work and how to protect themselves. Social workers, teachers, and corrections officers will still be on the lookout for resources to use when helping the young people in their care.

If this funding is removed, Planned Parenthood will no longer be there to answer their question. There won't be anyone to answer the phone or respond to their emails with questions about their bodies, their relationships, or their options.

These young people deserve to have their questions answered. We the people elected you. So I hope you're prepared to answer to those young people. Someone should have to.