

HEALTHY YOUTH ACT (HB 1855)
TESTIMONY 2/15/07
Gina O'Daniel

Thank you, Representative Sommers, and members of the Appropriations Committee, for the opportunity to address you today on House Bill 1855, the Healthy Youth Act.

My name is Gina O'Daniel. I am speaking today on behalf of the 150,000 members of the Washington State Parent teacher Association, of which I am a state board member as Program Director. As you know, in January 2005, by request of the State Legislature, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Department of Health (DOH) published a set of guidelines for effective sexual health education.

The PTA supports legislation and policies that require all public schools to follow the guidelines published by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and provide a medically accurate sexual health curriculum. We believe that we must ensure that our youth have access to the most accurate, current, comprehensive sex education.

I am testifying today before the House Appropriations Committee, so instead of focusing on all of the public health benefits of this legislation, I will focus on the fiscal ones.

Between 1991 and 2004 there were over 114,400 teen births in Washington, costing taxpayers a total of \$2.2 billion over that period. Reducing teen pregnancy will not only improve the well-being of children, families and communities, but it will also reduce the burden on taxpayers.

In 2002, more than 6,200 STDs were reported among young people in Washington 10 to 19 years old. HIV rates are increasing among the same age group. The cost of managing all of these STDs is much more expensive than preventing them.

The fiscal note attached to this bill is intended to help teachers, schools and school districts provide good comprehensive sexual health education to Washington's youth. It is a small investment for such an enormous outcome.

One more point for the committee: this legislation, and the funding that we put into it, is not just an investment in teens. It is a lifetime investment. Most people will not abstain for their entire lives. Over 60% of teens are sexually active by age 18 and nearly all will be sexually active within a decade after they graduate. These men and women won't have a health educator in their pockets on their wedding nights.

It's unethical and fiscally irresponsible not to provide Washingtonians with accurate and complete information with which to protect themselves and those they love.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.