

PREVENTION FIRST COALITION

An Act Relative to Health Education

Sponsored by Senator Pam Resor and Representative Ruth Balser

Summary: Since 1996, the federal government has funded the so-called “abstinence-only-until marriage” formula grant program since 1996.ⁱ The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has allocated \$50 million in federal funding each year to the states through this program.ⁱⁱ Participating states must match every four dollars of federal funds with three dollars of non-federal funds, making a total of \$87.5 million in public funding available each year.ⁱⁱⁱ

States that choose to accept these funds must operate under specific guidelines outlined in Title V, Section 510 (b). In late August 2006, the federal guidelines were changed for Fiscal Year 2007. The new guidelines further limit a state’s ability to use this money in an effective manner. *An Act Relative to Health Education* bars any state agency or political subdivision of Massachusetts from applying for any federal grant for abstinence-only education.

Previous Guidelines

Under the previous guidelines, state programs receiving federal abstinence-only funds were not required to address every element of the below definition; they had been required to not *contradict* any element of the definition.^{iv} This limited flexibility allowed states to pick and choose among the elements in the definition to avoid the more problematic content, thus allowing states to use the funding in more locally- and educationally appropriate ways.

A state abstinence only program is eligible for federal funding when it:^v

A) has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, physiological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;

B) teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children;

C) teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;

D) teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity;

E) teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;

F) teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;

G) teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and

H) teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.

The Current FY 2007 Federal Directives

Three major changes^{vi} in the new federal guidelines raise substantial concerns:

1. The newly revised guidelines state that “Each element of A through H should be meaningfully represented in all grantee’s federally funded abstinence education programs and curricula.” This new language directs participating states to emphasize *all eight points* instead of being able to qualify by emphasizing a few relevant points.
2. **The state also must now provide assurances that it is taking measures to ensure that funded programs “do not promote contraception and/or condom use.”** This rule only further restricts the ability of education programs to deliver important, medically-accurate information to young people, thus putting them at risk for STDs and pregnancy.
3. The new guidelines have expanded the scope of the program to include unmarried adults from ages 19 to 29. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, over 90% of people ages 20 to 29 have had sexual intercourse. This population needs information that is relevant to their lives, such as contraceptive options, so they may better protect themselves from STDs and unintended pregnancy.

Conclusion

In light of the increasingly restrictive changes to the federal guidelines for Title V state abstinence education funding, the Prevention First Coalition is urging Massachusetts to join New Jersey, California, and Maine in rejecting these funds. To that end, Representative Ruth Balser has filed *An Act Relative to Health Education*, which bars any state agency or political subdivision of Massachusetts from applying for any federal grant for abstinence-only education.

Prevention First Coalition

C/O Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy, 105 Chauncy Street, 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02111. 617-482-9122 ext. 114.
American Association of University Women of Massachusetts, ACLU of Massachusetts, AIDS Action Committee, AIDS Project Worcester,
Boston AIDS Consortium, Boston Health Commission, Cambridge Cares about AIDS, Gay & Lesbian Advocates and Defenders,
Health Quarters, Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation, Inc., Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy,
Massachusetts Asian and Pacific Islanders for Health, Massachusetts Citizens for Public Schools, Massachusetts Coalition for Choice,
Massachusetts Family Planning Association, Massachusetts NOW, Multicultural AIDS Coalition, NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts,
North Shore Health Project, Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Roca, Inc,
Simmons College School of Social Work-Urban Leadership Program, Strongest Link AIDS Services, Tapestry Health

ⁱ The 1996 federal welfare reform law made abstinence-only grants available to the states under Title V of the Social Security Act, section 501.

ⁱⁱ *Kaiser Daily Women’s Health Policy Report*, October 27, 2006.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sexuality Information & Education Council of the United States, SIECUS State Profiles: A Portrait of Sexuality Education and Abstinence - Only - Until - Marriage Programs in the States (2003).

^{iv} Cynthia Dailard, Abstinence Promotion and Teen Family Planning: The Misguided Drive for Equal Funding, GUTTMACHER REP. ON PUB. POLICY, February 2002.

^v Social Security Act, Title V, Section 510 (b)(2).

^{vi} *FY 2007 Program Announcement*, Section 510 Abstinence Education Program, August 2006.