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Proven Programs Bill Allows State to Seek Funding for Effective Sex Education

To make reasoned, healthy choices about sex and sexuality, young people must have access to full and accurate information. In 2007 the state legislature passed the Healthy Youth Act, which the ACLU-WA strongly backed. It requires school districts that provide sex education to teach medically accurate information, including facts about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

Yet, despite the Healthy Youth Act, state law still required the Department of Health to apply for federal funds that can only be used for teaching medically inaccurate “abstinence-only” programs. The legislature remedied this conflict in 2009 by adopting another ACLU-supported measure, the Proven Programs bill, which allows the health department to apply for federal funding that promotes truly comprehensive education about reproductive choices.

ACLU-WA’s leadership in advancing the Healthy Youth Act led to an invitation to speak at a national summit on sexual health education in Washington, DC, where we described our strategies around a survey of school district sex education programs – a project critical to passage of the Healthy Youth Act. The survey found that nearly 30 percent of school districts taught that abstinence is the only way to prevent pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, or that all sexual activity outside marriage is harmful.