

Sex Ed on the Line

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

also to support staff in schools. In communities of color, it's a bit more of a taboo."

Williams said the fact that teen pregnancies have diminished in recent years is proof that comprehensive sex education works.

"Look at the statistics. Numbers don't lie and we have been able to make such huge progress," she said. "But we don't need the government to censor us."

Talking to their children about sex is often difficult for people of color, because it's traditionally been less acceptable than some other cultures. But funding through Title X grants through

Multnomah County have helped nonprofits give parents and educators the tools they need – the facts and science about sex – and as a result, teen pregnancy rates have gone down dramatically in our area.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, from 2001 to 2015, teen pregnancies for 15 to 17 year olds decreased from about 32 for every 1,000 females to 11 per 1,000.

That will no longer be the case if the federal government's "gag rule" for Title X grants goes forward, said Jimmy Rodasta, spokesman for Planned Parenthood Oregon.

"Everything about this gag rule



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Jimmy Rodasta, spokesman for Planned Parenthood Oregon, said a new gag rule on discussing the full range of options for preventing pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases is dangerous and will reverse gains made against unintended pregnancies and STD rates.

is dangerous and will reverse all the great progress and unintended pregnancy and STD rates," Rodasta said. "We are deeply concerned that this will take us backwards at a time we can't afford to be doing this."

Multnomah County in 2015 used \$1.25 million in Title X grants to educate 15,000 teens, train 107 teachers and engage 329 parents and caregivers in 32 middle and high schools throughout the county.

After receiving that same

amount for three years, last year Health and Human Services terminated the county's grants without explanation. The county has joined a class action lawsuit objecting to the cancellation. In five cases, federal judges have ruled those types of terminations unlawful, meaning HHS must still process grant applications. But whether the federal government will appeal those rulings is unknown at this time, according to the county, so many programs are in limbo.

The 2015 funding from Title X was administered by the county in partnership with Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette, Latino Network, Self Enhancement Inc., the Native Youth and Family Center, and Boys & Girls Clubs of Portland.

Kim Toevs, director of the Adolescent Sexual Health Equity program for the county, said it's important to keep a wide range of information about sexual health and pregnancy legal. She said the White House restrictions are based on morality concerns, not science, and that's not what Congress intended.

"The new rule is a burden on communities of color," she said.

Veronica Leonard, health and wellness manager for the Latino Network, said the data is clear that Title X-funded sex education has benefited communities of color.

"But now they are erecting more barriers to information and health services," she said. "Without funding it's harder to do our work and people will lose jobs."

According to Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, the administration's new rules would mean that the 41 percent of Oregonians who rely on Planned Parenthood would lose access to essential services like birth control, cancer screenings, and STD testing and treatment.

In addition, if Planned Parenthood is excluded entirely from Ti-

tle X funding, because they offer abortion services (for which they use no federal funds), that would mean other Title X-funded sites in the state, already stretched thin, would have to increase their contraceptive client caseloads by 69 percent.

The new rules would also place new restrictions for doctors, nurses, hospitals and any other health provider working under Title X to tell their patients how they can safely and legally access abortion.

Title X is the only federal grant program dedicated to family planning and related health services, and was designed to meet the needs of low-income families and those with no insurance.

The Administration's new restrictions are opposed by the American Medical Association, the American College of Physicians and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, along with more than 110 other public health organizations, according to Planned Parenthood.

Last month, U.S. Sens. Patty Murray, D-Wash., Tammy Baldwin, D-Wisc., and Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., introduced a resolution opposing the restrictions claiming they would "undermine the health care access for millions of patients."

Dr. David Barbe, president of the AMA, released a statement that his group is "particularly alarmed" by government interference in patient-physician relationships.

"High-quality medical care relies on honest, unfiltered conversations between patients and their physicians," he wrote. "Title X is popular, successful and has had bipartisan support for decades. We are at a 30-year low for unintended pregnancy and a historic low for pregnancy among teenagers – largely because of expanded access to birth control. We should not be walking that progress back."

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