



TESTIMONY

Testimony of Alecia McGregor,
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member of the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates

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Good afternoon Councilmember Barry and other distinguished Councilmembers.

My name is Alecia McGregor and I am the Evaluation and Program Development Manager of Metro TeenAIDS and a member of the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates.

I am here today to testify on the interconnections between poverty, unproductive out-of-school time and HIV/AIDS. As you may know, Washington, DC's HIV/AIDS epidemic maintains a very close relationship with our city's poorest residents. Where poverty goes, so goes AIDS. Poverty and HIV/AIDS are simultaneously destroying the children, youth and families we serve.

Our youth need more constructive opportunities than hanging on the street corner. Programs that provide productive, positive activities for youth in the time after school and for youth who have dropped out of school, are crucial and must be made available in the nation's capital.

Unfortunately, many of our youth leave school to return to an unsupervised home. Without more constructive alternatives, these unsupervised young people are susceptible to use that idle time after school before mom gets home to "rep a hood," get involved with a gang, or otherwise become entangled with social circles where youth may be pressured to define themselves and behaviors according to gang norms. In peer pressured social circles where male teens feel pressured to play a dominant, controlling and often violent role in romantic relationships, risky sexual encounters are unfortunately taking place. Furthermore, in this environment many teenage girls suffer from low feelings of self-worth and lack the skills to negotiate condom use, acting as the less-empowered counterpart in this social dynamic. These factors leave many youth at risk for HIV and STD infection and teen pregnancy. Similarly, among bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender youth, sexual risk behaviors often take place given unsupervised, unproductive idle time.

Metro TeenAIDS can attest to the importance of



programs that keep youth off the streets, provide them with skills, and give them reasons not to become infected with HIV. Through civic engagement and educational activities, community volunteering; and mentorship, we have helped many young people to break away from gang affiliation, complete school, and strive to be more productive community members. . Through self-esteem building activities we help young people to embrace themselves and to realize that regardless of sexual orientation, gender, and socioeconomic status they are worth making positive decisions to avoid risky sex behavior. We do all this because we know that youth with few activities to keep them busy after school hours and dim future outlooks are more likely to be infected with HIV.

We are certain that with a reduction in poverty - through greater access to fair wage jobs, affordable housing, and greater services for youth including more significant after-school programming, we will see a subsequent decrease in HIV infections.

For these reasons, we join the Council and city in finding new and better ways to combat poverty. We must prioritize strengthening out-of-school-time programs for youth. Ultimately, we want there to be an out-of-school-time program in every neighborhood in the District, so that every youth who wants to access one can.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before your committee today. In addition, I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.

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