

**Testimony in Opposition of House Bill 293
House Health Committee
Representative Barbara Boyd, Chair**

**December 2, 2009
Charlene A. Coughlin**

Madam Chairman; Vice Chair Carney, Ranking Minority Member Wachtmann, and Committee members: My name is Charlene Coughlin. I am an instructor at Operation Keepsake, Inc. and have been with the organization for one and a half years. I have more than 6 years experience in working with teens and young adults in various community settings. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you in opposition of House Bill 293, The Ohio Prevention First Act, which would eliminate support and access to abstinence centered education.

My first week in the classroom among mostly freshman students at a large high school in Northeast Ohio, I immediately saw the importance of abstinence-centered education. On Friday, after spending a week with the students, one of the young girls in the classroom came up to me and wanted to talk to me about the relationship she was currently in. She had just started dating a guy two weeks earlier. She was dating him because he made her feel wanted-not necessarily because she liked his character or the person she was when she was with him. After just two dates, she was having sex with him. The words she said to me as we finished talking has continued to resonate with me and I'm reminded of them whenever I am in classrooms:

"I wish you would have been here a week earlier-I would have never had sex with him."

This isn't an isolated incident. This happens in schools. I hear from students who are longing for someone to encourage them to remain abstinent. They want to hear the message that it's okay to wait to have sex ... that not everyone is having sex ... and that marriage is worth waiting for.

I'd like to share with you just a few examples of statements from students that I have worked with.

- **I believe that kids our age don't think about what they are doing. Things that could ruin their lives forever. They don't put any thought into it. Sex is very overrated for young adults. It's just natural for kids to want to follow the paths of their friends, peers, of the media-which is not a good idea most of the time. People should build their own path and not follow others. Sex is very special and it's a serious thing. You should wait to share that with your spouse. (15 year old, Female)**
- **In my health class we had a speaker come in. I have to say she is awesome! She is funny and she not only shows us reasons not to have sex but is creative while getting our attention. The speaker that came to my school really opened many people's minds and ideas about staying abstinent-including me. She also showed the consequences that can happen with unsafe choices. I hope that all schools can have a motivator come in that keeps you choosing wise choices. (14 year old)**
- **I believe in saving sex till marriage. Before I had Operation Keepsake, Inc. I didn't think saving sex was such a big deal-until I had Ms. Coughlin. Before I had this class I made a promise to myself that I would save sex till college, but Operation Keepsake, Inc. totally turned everything around. I made a new promise to myself that I would save it till marriage and give my virginity to someone I made a promise to love them forever. I have a dream in life to work in fashion and if I choose to have sex before I get married, I might end up with an STI or a baby. I want to thank you guys for everything you do. You made a huge impact in my life.**

Thank you so much. I believe in myself-I can stay sexually abstinent until marriage. (15 year old)

I've heard countless stories from teens who thought that using a condom was enough. They thought it was okay to have sex with multiple partners. And who thought they would never be at risk for a sexually transmitted infection or teen pregnancy. They've bought into the message-just use a condom or birth control and you will be fine.

Charlene A. Coughlin