



## RHODE ISLAND

***Rhode Island received \$565,537 in federal funds for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in Fiscal Year 2006.<sup>1</sup>***

### **Rhode Island Sexuality Education Law and Policy**

Rhode Island schools are required to provide “accurate information and instruction” on sexuality, HIV, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Schools must also teach “the responsibilities of family membership and adulthood, including issues related to reproduction, abstinence, dating, marriage, and parenthood, as well as information about sexually transmitted diseases, sexuality and lifestyles.” These classes must stress abstinence.

In addition, the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education must “establish comprehensive AIDS instruction, which shall provide students with accurate information and instruction on AIDS transmission and prevention, and which course shall also address abstinence from sexual activity as the preferred means of prevention, as a basic education program requirement.”

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education must establish a state health education curriculum for grades K-12. This curriculum, *Rules and Regulations for School Health*, is based on the *Comprehensive Health Instructional* and the *Health Education Framework*. Schools are required to use it.

Parents must be notified of sexuality education classes and may view the curriculum by submitting a written request. Students may be removed from instruction by written notification from the parent to the principal. This is referred to as an “opt-out” policy.

See Rhode Island Statute 16-1-5, 16-22-17, and 16-22-18 as well as the *Rules and Regulations for School Health*, *Comprehensive Health Instructional*, and the *Health Education Framework*.

### **Recent Legislation**

*Legislation Expands Health Education for K-12 to include Comprehensive Sexuality Education*

Senate Bill 2940 and House Bill 7613, introduced in March and February of 2006 respectively, would expand the areas of health and physical instruction for grades K-12 in public schools to include comprehensive sexuality education, or health education, defined in part by being “medically accurate, culturally sensitive, scientifically-based, age-appropriate” instruction that “respects community values and does not teach or promote religion.” SB 2940 was referred to the Senate Committee on Education and HB 7613 was referred to the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare.

**Events of Note**

*Rhode Island Department of Education Reverses Decision, Approves Revised Heritage Curriculum*  
December 2006; RI

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has approved the use of a revised version of Heritage of Rhode Island's abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum.

State Education Commissioner Peter McWalters stated that Heritage received approval after it incorporated the recommendations by the review committee.<sup>2</sup> The revised curriculum includes information about the efficacy of condoms and how they are used to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Heritage removed a handout that compared marriage and cohabitation.

In March 2006, RIDE banned Heritage of Rhode Island from public schools after the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) complained that the program's curriculum reinforced gender stereotypes. "The curriculum had these incredible sexist viewpoints about men and women and boys and girls that seemed to come out of the nineteenth century," explained the executive director of the Rhode Island ACLU.<sup>3</sup> School districts also raised concerns. The Pawtucket Schools Superintendent stated, "We really don't promulgate any religious opinions in this school system. I think basically that's what they were trying to do here."<sup>4</sup>

Despite the revisions, the ACLU is still wary of the program, "We have some concerns with the medical accuracy of it. It is very clear that health education programs and sex education programs have an obligation to be medically accurate," the executive director said.<sup>5</sup>

Heritage is already in discussion with schools in Warwick and Woonsocket about implementing its revised curriculum. (See the CBAE and AFLA section for more information on Heritage of Rhode Island.)

**Rhode Island's Youth: Statistical Information of Note<sup>6</sup>**

- In 2005, 45% of female high school students and 48% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared to 46% of female high school students and 48% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 2% of female high school students and 9% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported having had sexual intercourse before age 13 compared to 4% of female high school students and 9% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 9% of female high school students and 17% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported having had four or more lifetime sexual partners compared to 12% of female high school students and 17% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, 36% of female high school students and 37% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported being currently sexually active (defined as having had sexual intercourse in the three months prior to the survey) compared to 35% of female high school students and 33% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 59% of females and 73% of males in Rhode Island reported having used condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 56% of females and 70% of males nationwide.

- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 23% of females and 17% of males in Rhode Island reported having used birth control pills the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 21% of females and 15% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 16% of females and 28% of males in Rhode Island reported having used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 19% of females and 28% of males nationwide.
- In 2005, 87% of high school students in Rhode Island reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 88% of high school students nationwide.
- In 2000, Rhode Island's abortion rate was 23 per 1,000 women ages 15–19 compared to a teen abortion rate of 24 per 1,000 nationwide.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2004, Rhode Island's birth rate was 33 per 1,000 women ages 15–19 compared to a teen birth rate of 41 per 1,000 nationwide.<sup>8</sup>

### **Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding**

Rhode Island received \$165,277 in Title V funding in Fiscal Year 2006. The Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage grant requires states to provide three state-raised dollars or the equivalent in services for every four federal dollars received. The state match may be provided in part or in full by local groups. In Rhode Island, the federal funding is matched with \$123,958 in state funding.

The federal funding supports *Men 2B*, a program that trains men in high-risk communities to be role models. Each of the programs involves a minimum of 60 men who attend at least 12 hours of training on topics such as adolescent development, communication skills, boundary setting, the role of men in society and the family, and resources for youth who need help with additional problems. *Men 2B* is now offered in Spanish, as well.

The remainder of the federal funding is divided among four sub-grantees: Project Hope/*Proyecto Esperanza* (a service center of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence), the Retired Senior Volunteer Association, the Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership, and the Urban League of Rhode Island.

The state funding continues to support a media campaign entitled *Be There For Teens* which has been scaled back in the last year and now orchestrates smaller awareness-raising mailings to schools and churches. The funding is also used to maintain the website [www.parentlinkri.org](http://www.parentlinkri.org) and *Can We Talk*, which is a series of 4 interactive workshops offered statewide to help parents talk with their pre-teenage children about self-esteem, sexuality, HIV, and peer pressure. All funding is controlled by the Rhode Island Department of Health's Division of Family Health.

### **Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) and Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) Grantees**

Rhode Island has one CBAE grantee: Heritage of Rhode Island. There are no AFLA grantees in Rhode Island.

Heritage of Rhode Island is affiliated with Heritage Community Services of South Carolina and uses different two programs, *Right Time, Right Place* and *Heritage Keepers*, a character-based curriculum that it designed. SIECUS reviewed *Heritage Keepers, Abstinence Education I* and found that it contains

very little information about important topics in human sexuality such as puberty, anatomy, and sexual behavior. Even topics that are frequently discussed in detail in other abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, such as condoms and STDs, receive very little mention. Instead, the curriculum devotes most of its lessons to the importance of marriage and abstinence before marriage. It relies on messages of fear and shame and promotes biased views of gender, marriage, and pregnancy options. For example, the curriculum tells students that “males are more sight orientated whereas females are more touch orientated. This is why girls need to be careful with what they wear, because males are looking! The girl might be thinking fashion, while the boy is thinking sex. For this reason, girls have a responsibility to wear modest clothing that doesn’t invite lustful thoughts.”<sup>9</sup>

Heritage of Rhode Island provides similar messages on its *Right Time, Right Place* program website: “In the *Right Time, Right Place*, sex is wonderful. However, when adolescents engage in sexuality activity the consequences are almost always harmful.”<sup>10</sup> Heritage of Rhode Island also features a video called *The Power to Wait*, in which young women are dancing and singing “...my power, my power to wait, this is the vow I take...virginity can’t be replaced...”<sup>11</sup> Research has found that under certain conditions such vows, most often referred to as virginity pledges, may help some adolescents delay sexual intercourse. When they work, pledges help this select group of adolescents delay the onset of sexual intercourse for an average of 18 months—far short of marriage. Researchers found that pledges only worked when taken by a small group of students. Pledges taken by a whole class were ineffective. More importantly, the studies also found that those young people who took a pledge were one-third less likely to use contraception when they did become sexually active than their peers who had not pledged. These teens are therefore more vulnerable to the risks of unprotected sexual activity such as unintended pregnancy and STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Further research has confirmed that although some students who take pledges delay intercourse, ultimately they are just as likely to contract an STD as their non-pledging peers. The study also found that the STD rates were higher in communities where a significant proportion (over 20%) of the young people had taken virginity pledges.<sup>12</sup> (See the Events of Note section for more information on Heritage of Rhode Island.)

**Federal and State Funding for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs in FY 2006**

<b>Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee</b>  <b>Length of Grant</b>	<b>Amount of Grant</b>	<b>Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, AFLA, and other funds)</b>
Rhode Island Department of Health  <i>Be There for Teens</i> <a href="http://www.health.state.ri.us/family/ofyss/teens/index.php">www.health.state.ri.us/family/ofyss/teens/index.php</a>  <i>Men 2B</i> <a href="http://www.health.state.ri.us/family/ofyss/teens/men2b.php">www.health.state.ri.us/family/ofyss/teens/men2b.php</a>	\$165,277 federal \$123,958 state	Title V

R H O D E I S L A N D

<b>Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee</b> <b>Length of Grant</b>	<b>Amount of Grant</b>	<b>Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, AFLA, and other funds)</b>
Project Hope/Proyecto Esperanza	\$66,450	Title V sub-grantee
The Retired Senior Volunteer Association	\$66,450	Title V sub-grantee
The Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership <a href="http://www.rimentor.org">www.rimentor.org</a>	\$27,700	Title V sub-grantee
The Urban League of Rhode Island <a href="http://www.ulri.org">www.ulri.org</a>	\$66,450	Title V sub-grantee
Heritage of Rhode Island 2004–2007 <a href="http://www.heritageri.org">www.heritageri.org</a>	\$400,260	CBAE

**Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Coordinator**

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Rhode Island Department of Health  
Division of Family Health  
3 Capitol Hill, Room 302  
Providence, RI 02908  
Phone: (401) 222-2312

**Rhode Island Organizations that Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

ACLU of Rhode Island  
128 Dorrance St., Suite 220  
Providence, RI 02903  
Phone: (401) 831-7171  
[www.riaclu.org](http://www.riaclu.org)

AIDS Care Ocean State  
18 Parkis Ave.  
Providence, RI 02907  
Phone: (401) 521-3603  
[www.aidscaeos.org](http://www.aidscaeos.org)

R H O D E I S L A N D

AIDS Project of Rhode Island  
232 West Exchange St.  
Providence, RI 02903  
Phone: (401) 831-5522  
[www.aidsprojectri.org](http://www.aidsprojectri.org)

PFLAG of Rhode Island  
500 Angell St., #212  
Providence, RI 02906  
Phone: (401) 751-7571  
[www.pflagprovidence.org](http://www.pflagprovidence.org)

Planned Parenthood of Rhode Island  
P.O. Box 41059  
Providence, RI 02940  
Phone: (421) 421-7820  
[www.ppri.org](http://www.ppri.org)

Rhode Island Alliance for Lesbian and Gay  
Civil Rights  
P.O. Box 5758, Weybosset Hill Station  
Providence, RI 02903  
Phone: (401) 521-GAYS  
[members.aol.com/RIAlliance](http://members.aol.com/RIAlliance)

Rhode Island Gender Community  
153 Ontario St.  
Providence, RI 02907  
Phone: (401) 273-0996  
[www.rigc.org](http://www.rigc.org)

Rhode Island National Organization  
for Women  
P.O. Box 8413  
Warwick, RI 02888  
[www.rinow.org](http://www.rinow.org)

**Rhode Island Organizations that Oppose Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

CareNet Rhode Island  
245 Phoenix Ave.  
Cranston, RI 02910  
Phone: (401) 941-4357  
[www.carenetri.org](http://www.carenetri.org)

Rhode Island Right to Life  
266 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02928  
Phone: (401) 521-1860  
[www.rirtl.org](http://www.rirtl.org)

**Newspapers in Rhode Island**

*The Call*  
Joseph Nadeau  
Education Staff Writer  
75 Main St.  
Woonsocket, RI 02895  
Phone: (401) 767-8599

*The Newport Daily News*  
Wendy Fontaine  
Education Reporter  
101 Malbone Rd.  
Newport, RI 02840  
Phone: (401) 849-3300

*The Providence Journal*  
Felice Freyer  
Health & Medicine Editor  
75 Fountain St.  
Providence, RI 02902  
Phone: (401) 277-7397

*The Providence Journal*  
Jennifer Jordan  
Education Reporter  
75 Fountain St.  
Providence, RI 02902  
Phone: (401) 277-7254

*The Times*  
 Joel Furfari  
 Health & Medicine Editor  
 23 Exchange St.  
 Pawtucket, RI 02860-2059  
 Phone: (401) 722-4000

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the fiscal year for the federal government which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, Fiscal Year 2006 begins on October 1, 2005 and ends on September 30, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Amanda K. Lowe, "Abstinence Ed Coming to Schools?" *Kent County Daily Times*, 4 December 2006, accessed 7 December 2006, <[http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=17548493&BRD=1718&PAG=461&dept\\_id=74409&rfi=6](http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=17548493&BRD=1718&PAG=461&dept_id=74409&rfi=6)>.

<sup>3</sup> John Catelucci, "State Says No to Sex-Education Program: Objections to the Program Had Been Raised by the American Civil Liberties Union, Which Said the Program Promoted Sexist Stereotypes," *Providence Journal*, 23 March 2006, accessed 13 April 2006, <[http://www.ptojo.com/education/content/projo\\_20060323\\_risexed23.daf84cc.html](http://www.ptojo.com/education/content/projo_20060323_risexed23.daf84cc.html)>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Lowe.

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise cited, all statistical information comes from Danice K. Eaton, et al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2005," *Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 55, no. SS-5 (9 June 2006): 1-108, accessed 26 January 2007, <<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>>.

<sup>7</sup> *U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics: Overall Trends, Trends by Race and Ethnicity and State-by-State Information* (New York: The Guttmacher Institute, February 2004), accessed 26 January 2007, <<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/2006/09/12/USTPstats.pdf>>.

<sup>8</sup> *National Vital Statistics Reports 55.01* (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2006), 10, accessed 26 January 2006, <[http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr55/nvsr55\\_01.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr55/nvsr55_01.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Badgley and Carrie Musselman, *Heritage Keepers Student Manual* (Charleston, SC: Heritage Community Services, 1999). For more information, see SIECUS' review of *Heritage Keepers* at <<http://www.communityactionkit.org/reviews/HeritageKeepers.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> "Our Programs," Heritage of Rhode Island, (2005), accessed 24 January 2007, <<http://www.heritagei.org/programs.html#2>>.

<sup>11</sup> "Media," Heritage of Rhode Island, (2005), accessed 5 February 2007, <<http://www.heritagei.org/media.html>>.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Bearman and Hannah Brückner, "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and the Transition to First Intercourse," *American Journal of Sociology* 106.4 (2001): 859-912; Peter Bearman and Hannah Brückner, "After the Promise: The STD Consequences of Adolescent Virginity Pledges," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 36.4 (2005): 271-278.