



RHODE ISLAND

Community-based organizations in Rhode Island received \$400,260 in federal funds for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in Fiscal Year 2007.¹

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

SIECUS is not aware of any proposed legislation regarding sexuality education in Rhode Island.

Events of Note

*After Years of Controversy, Heritage of Rhode Island Closes
December 2007; Warwick, RI*

Heritage of Rhode Island, an abstinence-only-until-marriage provider, shut its doors in December 2007 after weathering more than two years of scrutiny from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), parents and the ACLU. In that time, the program was also banned and then re-approved by RIDE for use in public schools.

In 2004, Heritage of Rhode Island, which received training and curricula from Heritage Community Services of South Carolina, began receiving a federal abstinence-only-until-marriage grants of \$400,260 per

year. That same year, a Pawtucket mother objected to a negative characterization of single parents in a Heritage workbook her son brought home and called the ACLU for help.²

The ACLU began by writing a letter to the state education commissioner charging that the Heritage program “promoted sexist stereotypes, isolated gay and lesbian students, and did not appear to comport with the state’s comprehensive sex education standards.”³ In March 2006, RIDE banned Heritage of Rhode Island from public schools because it failed to meet the state standards. The decision was celebrated by the Pawtucket parents and the ACLU, but it was short-lived.

In December 2006, RIDE reversed its decision and approved the use of a revised version of Heritage of Rhode Island’s abstinence-only-until-marriage curriculum. The state education commissioner explained that Heritage received approval after it incorporated the recommendations of a review committee.⁴ The revised curriculum included information about the efficacy of condoms and how they are used to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Heritage also removed a handout that compared marriage and cohabitation.

After being re-approved, Heritage began discussions with schools in Warwick and Woonsocket about implementing its revised curriculum but it faced continued opposition from the ACLU and many other community groups. The groups sent a letter to principals urging them to reject the program because it included “dangerous medical inaccuracies about pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted diseases” and sent “an inappropriate message to students from non-traditional households.”⁵

The fight was cut short, however, when Heritage’s federal grant was not renewed, and the organization officially closed in the winter of 2007. The former executive director of Heritage of Rhode Island said he was disappointed, but not surprised that the grant was not renewed. Rhode Island was a “limited market,” he continued. He also admitted that some principals had expressed concern over the media coverage of the controversy over Heritage.⁶

Rhode Island’s Youth: Statistical Information of Note⁷

- In 2007, 41% of female high school students and 50% of male high school students in Rhode Island reported ever having had sexual intercourse compared to 46% of female high school students and 50% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 2% of female high school students and 10% 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 10% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 7% of female high school students and 15% 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 18% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, 32% of female high school students and 35% 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 36% of female high school students and 34% of male high school students nationwide.
- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 61% of females and 71% of males in Rhode Island reported having used condoms the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 55% of females and 69% of males nationwide.

- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 26% of females and 16% of males in Rhode Island reported having used birth control pills the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 19% of females and 13% of males nationwide.
- In 2007, among those high school students who reported being currently sexually active, 15% of females and 25% of males in Rhode Island reported having used alcohol or drugs the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to 18% of females and 28% of males nationwide.
- In 2007, 89% of high school students in Rhode Island reported having been taught about AIDS/HIV in school compared to 90% of high school students nationwide.

Title V Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Funding

Rhode Island would have been eligible for \$165,277 in federal Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage funds in Fiscal Year 2007. 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. However, the state did not apply for these funds due to the extraordinary restrictions upon how the money must be spent. Therefore, the state does not match funds nor does it have organizations supported by this type of federal money.

Rhode Island did use remaining funds from Fiscal Year 2006 to continue supporting its previous Title V sub-grantee, the Greater Bridgeport Adolescent Pregnancy Program.

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

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

Heritage of Rhode Island was affiliated with Heritage Community Services of South Carolina. Heritage of Rhode Island has several abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, including the “Heritage Keepers Club” and “Right Time, Right Place.” These programs use curricula adapted from Heritage Community Services of South Carolina. SIECUS reviewed *Heritage Keepers, Abstinence Education I*, one of the curricula created by Heritage Community Services, 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 “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.”⁸⁸ Heritage of Rhode Island’s grant ended during 2007 and the organization has since closed its doors. (See the Events of Note section for more information on the closing of this organization.)

R H O D E I S L A N D

Federal and State Funding for Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs in FY 2007

Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Grantee Length of Grant	Amount of Grant	Type of Grant (includes Title V, CBAE, AFLA, and other funds)
Rhode Island Department of Health	\$33,000 federal (from FY06)	Title V
Greater Bridgeport Adolescent Pregnancy Program*		Title V sub-grantee
Heritage of Rhode Island 2004–2007 www.heritageri.org	\$400,260	CBAE

**SIECUS was unable to obtain the exact funding amount.*

Adolescent Health Contact⁹

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Division of Family Health
3 Capitol Hill, Room 302
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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

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

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

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

R H O D E I S L A N D

Rhode Island Organizations that Support Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Planned Parenthood of Rhode Island
P.O. Box 41059
Providence, RI 02940
Phone: (421) 421-7820
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

Rhode Island National Organization
for Women
P.O. Box 8413
Warwick, RI 02888
www.rinow.org

Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization
Project (CHAMP)
232 W. Exchange Street
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 427-2302
www.champnetwork.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

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

Newspapers in Rhode Island¹⁰

The Call
Newsroom
75 Main St.
Woonsocket, RI 02895
Phone: (401) 767-3000
www.woonsocketcall.com

The Newport Daily News
Newsroom
Box 402
101 Malbone Rd.
Newport, RI 02840
Phone: (401) 849-3300
www.newportdailynews.com

The Providence Journal-Bulletin
Newsroom
75 Fountain St.
Providence, RI 02902
Phone: (401) 277-7303
www.projo.com

The Times
Newsroom
23 Exchange St.
Pawtucket, RI 02860-2059
Phone: (401) 722-4000
www.pawtuckettimes.com

¹ 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 2007 begins on October 1, 2006 and ends on September 30, 2007.

² Amy Littlefield, "R.I. Abstinence Program Beats a Quiet Retreat," *Women's eNews*, 24 December 2007, accessed 6 June 2008, <www.womensenews.org/article.cfm?aid=3437>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ 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&rft=6>.

⁵ “Groups Urge Educators To Reject Sex-Ed Program,” *Providence Journal*, 8 May 2007, accessed 16 May 2007, <www.projo.com/news/content/aclu_sex_ed_05-08-07_IH5I5AL.3436651.html>.

⁶ Littlefield, “R.I. Abstinence Program Beats a Quiet Retreat.”

⁷ Unless otherwise cited, all statistical information comes from: Danice K. Eaton, et. al., “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007,” Surveillance Summaries, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 57.SS-4 (6 June 2008), accessed 4 June 2008, <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>.

⁸ 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>>.

⁹ SIECUS has identified this person as a state-based contact for information on adolescent health and if applicable, abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

¹⁰ This section is a list of major newspapers in your state with contact information for their newsrooms. This list is by no means inclusive and does not contain the local level newspapers which are integral to getting your message out to your community. SIECUS strongly urges you to follow stories about the issues that concern you on the national, state, and local level by using an internet news alert service such as [Google alerts](#), becoming an avid reader of your local papers, and establishing relationships with reporters who cover your issues. For more information on how to achieve your media goals visit the SIECUS [Community Action Kit](#).