

**Testimony to the Committee on Education
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on the State Board of Education**

**Jhirbron Tonge
Young Women's Project Peer Educator**

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Hello my name is Jhirbron Tonge. I am 17 years old and I currently attend School Without Walls Senior High School. I live in Ward 8 of Washington DC. I am planning on going to California University of Pennsylvania where I will study psychology. I am also a peer educator at the Young Women's Project.

The Young Women's Project is a DC-based nonprofit organization that builds the leadership and power of young people so that they can shape DC policies and institutions to expand rights and opportunities for DC youth. I work as part of the PHASE (Peer Health and Sexuality Education) campaign which works to expand comprehensive sexuality education, ensure access to community and school based reproductive health care, and engages both teen women and men as peer educators and decision makers.

I am here to support the work of the State Board of Education and to commend them for including youth in their efforts to revise the health education standards.

YWP's Work with SBOE

Peer educators at YWP have worked with the SBOE for two years during the development of the Health Education Standards -- and continue to work with them on other projects (like graduation requirements).

SBOE have welcomed us to the table, and have asked for our input. They have encouraged youth to testify about the health education standards during the SBOE monthly meetings, have previously met with YWP youth to talk about our ideas on the health standards, and graduation requirements, and have asked us to host a health standards review session for other youth- which will happen later this month. Under the leadership of the new Executive Director, John-Paul Hayworth, SBOE has also started its own Student Advisory Committee this year which is involved in many education issues.

SBOE is committed to addressing youth problems: When the Youth Working Group came up with a list of priority issues for the health education standards, SBOE President Jack Jacobson supported us on every issue we came up with, especially the mental health issues, that I'm so passionate about. He supported our full participation into

the work and decision making of the health working group. I testified during the January meeting about my mental health issues, and the importance of including mental health in our health education. During this meeting, President Jacobson was candid with us about his personal issues growing up as a teen, and that has helped us know that he is invested in our wellbeing, and understands why health education is so important to us. Thanks to SBOE I felt like my voice was heard & that I got the chance to express something that is very important to me. Something that many teens don't get the opportunity to talk about. So thank you.

SBOE has also made sure that the health education standards move through the process. They have been diligent engaging all of the people who need to be at the table, and they have worked with Assistant Superintendent Donna Anthony to make sure that she is up to speed on everything, and can effectively work with OSSE to move these standards along their processes.

As a DC teen who was dealt with depression, it's important for teens like me to have a say in how my school addresses mental health issues in health class. Many of my peers have dealt with other health issues, and have experienced many different types of health education, so it's key to involve all of us in this process.