



October 19, 2010

Melanie Davis
Kizer & Black
329 Cates Street
Maryville, TN 37801

Re: Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage Programs

Dear Ms. Davis:

We write to express our concern over the abstinence-only-until-marriage program taught in the Maryville City Schools, and urge you to correct the numerous problems detailed below. Students in your school district should be taught a family life education program that is inclusive, scientifically accurate, and teaches them that they have the ability to achieve their goals and be themselves. The program that they are currently receiving falls far short of that ideal, as discussed in the following examples.

Degrading Single-Parent Families

A number of the materials alienate children from single-family homes, and create the impression that they are inferior and less likely to achieve their goals. Although there may be some valid statistics about the disparities between children raised in single-family homes versus those raised with two parents, no child should be taught that he or she is not going to succeed in life or will suffer adverse consequences because his or her parents are not married. Indeed, indoctrinating students with statistic after statistic about the failures of children from single-family homes inevitably makes them feel that they are destined to a life of poverty, chemical abuse, and crime.

Some of the problematic information that is taught includes:

- Children in two-parent homes are “healthier, both physically and mentally, achieve higher education goals, and are less likely to bear children out-of-wedlock. Children in two-parent homes also experience less poverty and are less likely to commit crime. Overall, children of two-parent homes have a far greater advantage in life than children from a single-parent home.” Why kNOW, AAA Women’s Services, Sixth Grade Lesson One, page 2 (1999).

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- “85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes; 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes; 75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes; 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes; 85% of all youth sitting in prison grew up in fatherless homes.” Why kNOw, AAA Women’s Services, Sixth Grade Lesson One, page 4 (1999).

Enforcing Outmoded Gender Stereotypes

Several materials inappropriately reinforce outdated stereotypes about genders. Classifying boys and girls’ characteristics in outmoded ways instructs boys that they should be one way, and that girls should be the opposite. These old fashioned ideas have no place in our schools, particularly when they tell girls, on the one hand, that that they are superficial and driven by their emotions, and that guys should disregard their feelings. These materials also paint girls as the gatekeepers of sex; in other words, it is the girls’ responsibility to not dress in a manner that attracts boys and to bear the responsibility to say no - when instead this should be a shared decision - and if they don’t say no, they will pay the highest price.

Some problematic materials include:

- “Girls tend to talk more and [sic] much more relational while guys are less emotional. Guys are physically stimulated . . . whereas girls are emotionally driven. Guys tend to have less manners than [sic] girls . . . and care less about what they look like. Girls spend much more time trying to look good and caring about what they wear.” Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 6th Grade Questions; *see also* 10th Grade Questions.
- “[G]uys are visually stimulated [so] what girls wear is extremely important when they are anticipating respect, especially from the opposite sex.” Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 6th Grade Questions; *see also* 10th Grade Questions.
- “Girls will always pay the higher price for sex.” This includes carrying the baby to term, higher risk for long term STD damage, emotional pain, and side effects of birth control. Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 10th Grade, Slides 10, 18.

Instilling Shame and Fear

The graphic photos of sexually transmitted infections used in Just Wait program are designed for one purpose: to scare teens into not having sex. Scaring teens in this manner is a problematic pedagogical tool when it comes to sex. Teens should be taught that sexuality is a part of who they are, and it is not something to be afraid of. They should also be taught the tools they instead need to make healthy decisions.

Teaching Medical Inaccuracies

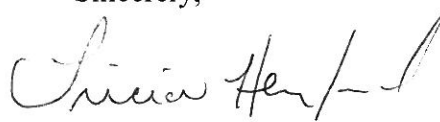
There are a disturbing number of scientifically inaccurate facts taught to students. No student should receive blatantly incorrect information, particular on such an important matter as preventing sexually transmitted infections and protecting against unintended pregnancies. Some inaccuracies include:

- Just Wait claims “[t]here is a 1/6 chance the condom will not prevent the female from getting pregnant.” Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 8th Grade, Slide 12. This is incorrect. Used correctly for every act of sexual intercourse, a couple’s chance of experiencing an unintended pregnancy over the course of a year is 2%.
- Similarly, Just Wait suggests using a game involving 5 Hersey’s candy bars and one Ex Lax bar, telling students that they must eat what they get. Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 10th Grade, Slides 14-16. This incorrectly teaches that teens have a 1 and 6 chance of getting pregnant when using a condom. Again, used correctly for every act of sexual intercourse, a couple’s chance of experiencing an unintended pregnancy over the course of a year is 2%.
- Just Wait also claims that abortion will “likely have emotional consequences.” Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 8th Grade, Slide 14, and 10th Grade, Slide 20. To the contrary, the American Psychological Association has found no evidence that a single abortion causes mental harm.
- Just Wait claims that condoms “offer[] little [sic] no protection from” syphilis. Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 8th Grade, Slide 20; *see also* 10th grade, slide 30. To the contrary, condoms do provide some protection, especially when the lesion is covered by the condom.

- Just Wait claims that mutual masturbation puts teens at risk for STDs. Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 10th Grade, Slide 8. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control considers mutual masturbation a low-risk activity.
- Just Wait claims that a condom reduces the risk for HIV infection, but there is still a 1 in 6 chance of contracting HIV with a condom. Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 10th Grade, Slides 27, 52. In truth, there is no chance of contracting HIV unless a partner is infected, and among heterosexual couples in the United States, in a single act of vaginal intercourse without a condom, a person who has sex with an infected partner has about a 0.08% to 0.14% chance of contracting HIV.
- Just Wait also makes a number of inaccurate claims about HPV. Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 10th Grade, Slide 47. First, it creates the impression that HPV always leads to cervical cancer. To the contrary, the National Cancer Institute states that HPV is very common and most strains go away on their own. Further, Just Wait says that condoms offer little or no protection against HPV. Again, the National Cancer Institute states that condoms do offer some protection against HPV. Lastly, Just Wait claims that as many people die of cervical cancer as AIDS every year. This is incorrect. About 4,000 women die of cervical cancer in the U.S., and about 17,000 people die of AIDS.
- Just Wait also says that AIDS leads to death. Just Wait, Hope Resource Center, 10th Grade, Slide 52. Although HIV is and continues to be a serious disease, “the median time from infection with HIV to the development of AIDS-related symptoms has been approximately 10 to 12 years in the absence of antiretroviral therapy,” and with medical treatments available today it is largely a controllable condition.

Thank you for your time and attention this matter. We would appreciate hearing from you about changes you will make to the program to address our concerns. We are also happy to meet with you in person to discuss further.

Sincerely,



Tricia Herzfeld
Staff Attorney