ACLU TAKE ISSUE TAKE CHARGE

LIFE, LIBERTY, AND REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM

How public health professionals are getting involved to ensure that teens have access to the information they need to make healthy and responsible decisions.

WASHINGTON

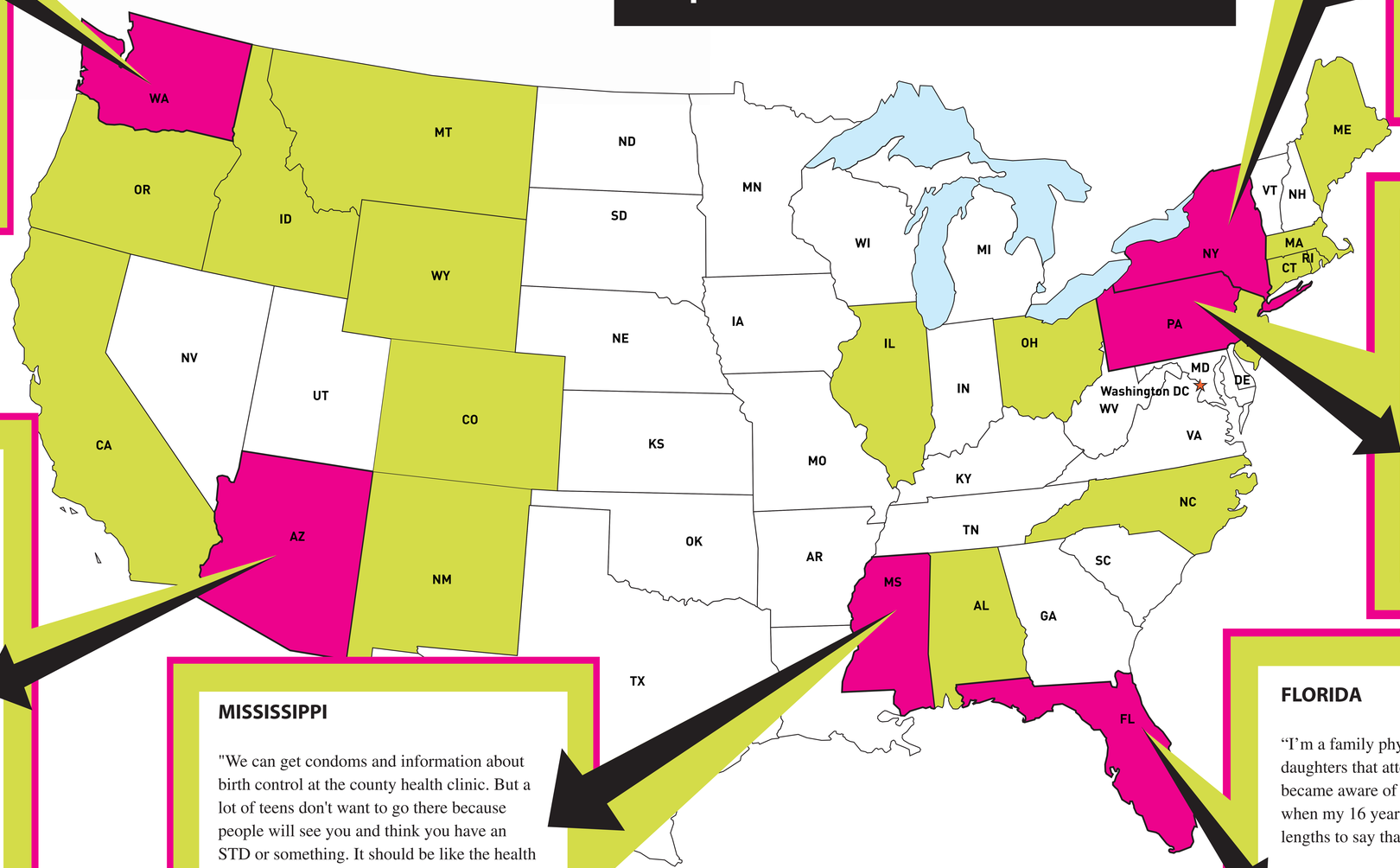
Staff at the Department of Health played a critical role in drafting the "Guidelines for Sexual Health Information and Disease Prevention." These guidelines were a pivotal tool in our advocacy efforts to get the Healthy Youth Act passed by the legislature this year. Now, the WA State Department of Health is working with the ACLU and other advocates in implementing the sex education legislation.

—Genevieve Aguilar, Field Director, ACLU of Washington—coalition member in the Healthy Youth Alliance.

NEW YORK

"As a public health student, I couldn't believe that we were withholding information from teens in New York City where we have one of the highest rates of new HIV cases in the nation. That is why I got involved in advocating that the Mayor mandate that comprehensive sex education be taught in the public schools."

—Sharyn Rothstein is currently enrolled in the master's program for public health at Hunter College and is a member of the SEANY coalition, the Sex Ed Alliance of New York City.



PENNSYLVANIA

"I couldn't believe it. I was appalled. I expected my children would be getting medically accurate, quality education. When I saw that they weren't and when I further saw the curriculum they were using, which is just so deficient in so many ways, I said this cannot be. I reached out to my friends, several of whom are doctors and public health professionals, and my children's friends, and we organized and went to testify at the school board."

—Terry Klein is a mother of two in Pittsburgh, PA and a board member of the ACLU of PA.

ARIZONA

"The fact that Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage programs do not address the benefits of condoms and contraceptives is particularly disconcerting in the state with the second highest teen pregnancy rate and the sixth highest teen birth rate in the nation. According to the Arizona department of Health Services, Latinas "accounted for 56% of all pregnancies among females 19 and younger." In Arizona, the teen pregnancy rate for Latinas is more than triple the pregnancy rate for white non-Hispanic teens. With high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy, it is critical to evaluate whether the $3.3 million dollars spent on abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in the upcoming year is an effective use of taxpayer funds."

—Excerpt from a letter sent to Governor Napolitano signed by Anabell Castro, President of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses, Valle del Sol Chapter, and Dr. Elizabeth Ortiz de Valdez, Executive Director of the Concilio Latino de Salud.

MISSISSIPPI

"We can get condoms and information about birth control at the county health clinic. But a lot of teens don't want to go there because people will see you and think you have an STD or something. It should be like the health department can come into the school and talk to people about sex and HIV and stuff. There should be a class in each school in Holmes County to talk to people about STDs because I mean it's good to sit down and talk about it so that young people can think about it and then slow down before they do things."

—Robert Washington, Peer Educator in the Holmes County 'Teen Chat' program.

KEY

Additional states where public health professionals can get involved in advocacy efforts.

FLORIDA

"I'm a family physician in Melbourne Florida. I have two teenage daughters that attend public school in Brevard County. I really first became aware of how serious a problem abstinence-only programs are when my 16 year old brought home a booklet that went to great lengths to say that condoms don't work.

"I started practicing medicine at the dawn of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. To have my daughter bring this home was really a slap in the face to everything we know and have worked towards over the past 2 decades. I went to testify on the open record at the school board to make sure that teens get the information they need."

—Dr. Blythe is a physician who operates Blythe Family Health Care in Melbourne. He served on the Brevard County school district's advisory committee on sex education and worked with other parents and the ACLU of FL to advocate improved sex education in the public schools.

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