

FEDERAL FUNDING

Over the last ten years, Congress funneled over 1.1 billion federal dollars to failed abstinence-only-until-marriage education programs and so-called crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs). Under President G.W. Bush, Congress created the Community-Based Abstinence Education fund (CBAE), the largest ever pot of federal money (almost \$105 million in 2008) to support abstinence-only programs and CPCs. Other federal initiatives like Title V of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act and the 1981 Adult and Family Life Act, have also provided millions in federal dollars to abstinence-only programs and CPCs. Although more difficult to track, the federal government has also supported abstinence-only programs and CPCs through Marriage Promotion, HIV/AIDS prevention, and, Adoption Promotion initiatives.

STATE FUNDING

Congressional leaders often earmark funds for abstinence-only programs and CPCs in their home states. Many states subsidize CPCs through matching funds, state-sponsored programs, specific grants, and tax credits. Twenty-one states currently have “Choose Life” license plates programs. Of these, 11 – AL, AZ, HI, KY, MD, MO, MT, PA, SC, TN, and VA – donate funds raised to anti-choice organizations and CPCs (Gutmacher Institute, August 2009). Money from Florida’s “Choose Life” license program, for example, is exclusively for pregnant women *who promise to give their child up for adoption*.

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

Proponents (and some financial beneficiaries) of these federally and state funded programs are large, conservative religious organizations like some Catholic and evangelical Christian ministries. Under the GW Bush Administration, these organizations successfully exported failed abstinence-only education and CPCs around the globe. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), for example, a \$48 billion dollar initiative to combat HIV/AIDS globally (proposed by former President Bush in 2003 and reauthorized in 2008), still promotes abstinence-only and “be-faithful” programs and limits the distribution of condoms. In March 2009 Pope Benedict XVI publicly claimed AIDS “...cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which even aggravates the problems,” while visiting sub-Saharan Africa where an estimated 75% of worldwide AIDS deaths occur each year.

THE GOOD NEWS

In 2009, Congress heeded President Obama’s call to return to evidence-based pregnancy prevention programs and refused to renew most sources of federal funding for abstinence-only education and CPCs, including CBAE and Title V. These funds will instead be redirected to effective, evidence-based, teen pregnancy prevention programs and promising prevention models.

Now is the time to return to scientifically proven strategies to reduce unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, eliminate all funding for abstinence-only programs and fake clinics, and to increase funding for sexual and reproductive health care *in the US and worldwide*. We must urge our policymakers to crack down on the deceptive advertising practices of so-called crisis pregnancy centers and prohibit them from falsely advertising with the intent to deceive the public.