



Memo

Senate Fails To Pass The Healthy Teens Act

40,000 Teens Become Pregnant Each Year in New York, But the State Senate Refuses to Act

While the New York State Assembly passed the Healthy Teens Act two years in a row, the Senate again failed to bring the bill to the floor for a vote this year.

Tens of thousands of New Yorkers appealed to the Senate to pass the Healthy Teens Act during the last month of the 2006 legislative session. But while nearly 40,000 teens continue to become pregnant each year in New York, the Senate refused to pass legislation to support age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education.

The bill passed the Assembly by a vote of 127-15 on April 3 under the leadership of Speaker Sheldon Silver and Assemblymember Richard Gottfried, who sponsored the bill in his house. Members of the Assembly called the bill, "one of the most important pieces of legislation we'll vote on this year." Yet the Senate left Albany without voting on the Healthy Teens Act, even though the Senate Health Committee favorably reported the bill on May 23.

"The Senate has failed New York's young people," said JoAnn M. Smith, president and CEO of Family Planning Advocates of New York State. "New York has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the nation. The Healthy Teens Act would help to provide the information young people need to make healthy choices throughout their lives. This is inexcusable."

FPA's Ed Fund Works to Improve Cultural Competency Among Family Planning Providers

The Education Fund of Family Planning Advocates convened a statewide meeting on June 15 to present the findings of its two-year cultural competency assessment project. Dr. Hetty Cunningham, assistant clinical professor of pediatrics at Columbia University, started the day with a talk on why culture matters in health care.

Work groups reviewed strategies for enhancing cultural competency on the organizational, systemic and policy levels. More than 70 people attended the meeting including representatives of several Planned Parenthood affiliates, the New York State Department of Health and immigrant-serving organizations.

The Education Fund has conducted cultural competency assessments at three health centers:

- Planned Parenthood Mohawk Hudson's Utica Center,
- Planned Parenthood of New York City's Boro Hall Center, and
- Community Healthcare Network's CABS Health Center in Brooklyn.



State and national efforts to measure and implement culturally competent services in healthcare were discussed by Rosemary Gomez of Community Healthcare Network, consultant Dr. Steve Roussos, Juanita Williams of SisterSong and Barbara Brustman, director of New York State's Bureau of Women's Health.

In This Issue

- 2 President's Column
- 2 Annual Conference
- 2 Scholarship Awards
- 3 Around New York
- 3 From the Hill
- 4 Real Sex Education and *The Education of Shelby Knox*



President's Column

Dear Friends,

This year's legislative session was a grueling process. Many of us feel let down by the Senate's failure to take action on so many needed reproductive health care measures.

The Senate walked away from an opportunity to provide real sex education to young people in New York. They also failed to vote on the Unintended Pregnancy Prevention Act, which would enhance access to emergency contraception.

The work that you did on these issues was fantastic! Senators were deluged with phone calls and faxes urging them to support our bills. Letters to the editor poured into newspapers all over the state. Teens, clergy, teachers, medical professional and countless coalition partners joined us to meet with legislators to encourage them to take action.

But key elected officials did not respond, and at the end of session we just did not have enough Senators who were committed to these important reforms.

Never have I been so reminded of the importance of elections. This January, the terms of every State Senator and Assemblymember in New York will come to an end, with each seat open for a vote in November. New Yorkers will also select a new Governor and a new Attorney General.

I urge you to get involved! Do your homework to find out which candidates are worthy of your vote. Learn which candidates will work on issues important to you. Find out about their positions, research their records.

Now is the time to make sure that you are registered to vote. Call your friends to see if they are registered too. The stakes are high: important issues will be decided in November's election. You can help shape the future of public policy in New York by getting involved now.

Sincerely,

JoAnn Smith
President and CEO

Kathy Najimy and Dr. Susan Wood Inspire FPA Conference Attendees

FPA's 29th Annual Conference, held on April 3-4, was an overwhelming success with nearly 1000 advocates flocking to Albany from across New York State. The Youth Conference had record-breaking attendance, with more than 175 teens convening in Albany to engage in education and activism.

The conference luncheon was packed with exciting speakers, performers and politicians, highlighted by Kathy Najimy's inspirational keynote speech. Assemblymember Amy Paulin graciously accepted FPA's Margaret Sanger Award. Dr. Susan Wood offered a profound rendering of the federal Food and Drug Administration's role in approving reproductive technologies like emergency contraception.

Renowned author Marge Piercy presented a seminar and autographed copies of her new book, *Sex Wars: A Novel of the Turbulent Post-Civil War Period*. Morning and afternoon workshops provided diverse and informational perspectives on issues including sex education, emergency contraception, and the future of *Roe v. Wade*.



Mernie Dempster Scholarships Awarded

This year's recipients of the Mernie Dempster Scholarship for Community Action were Rebekah Judson and Evan Crane, two 11th graders from the Poughkeepsie Day School.

The scholarships honor the memory of Hudson Valley hospital merger activist, Mary Catherine (Mernie) Dempster who died in April 2004. Mernie helped found the group, Save Our Services, to successfully block a hospital merger in her Kingston/Rhinebeck community in 1997.

The Mernie Dempster Scholarships provided the opportunity for Rebekah and Evan to attend FPA's 2006 Youth Leadership Conference.

Around New York

State Budget Includes Transition Funding for Certain Family Planning Centers

The final state budget agreement provided resources to assist some family planning centers with the transition to managed care. Nearly \$20 million will be distributed to certain family planning centers, community health care providers and academic dental clinics to support training and information technology upgrades.

FPA Fights to Preserve Family Planning Services for Poor and Immigrant Women

The Assembly passed a bill that would enable certain poor and immigrant women who have been abandoned by the federal government to continue to obtain needed family planning services. Although the Senate failed to approve the bill, FPA is working with the Governor's office and the Department of Health to continue to fund these vital programs.

EC Legislation Stalled until 2007

After passing the New York State Assembly in February, the Unintended Pregnancy Prevention Act stalled in the New York State Senate. This legislation would help to ensure that women of all ages have increased access to emergency contraception by enabling pharmacists and registered nurses to dispense EC through collaborative agreements with physicians. Action on this important bill will resume in earnest in the next legislative session with the promise of Eliot Spitzer to sign the Unintended Pregnancy Prevention Act if elected Governor.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America Taps FPA's Clergy Project Director

The director of FPA's Clergy Project, Rabbi Dennis Ross, was elected to the Executive Committee of the Eastern Council of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). Rabbi Ross also serves on the Executive Committee of the PPFA Clergy Advisory Board.

Planned Parenthood Welcomes New Staff

Margaret Abrego, Grassroots Organizer, and Margarita Hernandez, Community Affairs Coordinator, Planned Parenthood of New York City
Elizabeth Dedrick, Program Associate, Family Planning Advocates of New York State
Rebecca de Simone, Grassroots Organizer, Planned Parenthood Hudson Peconic

Campus Connection

The University at Albany's VOX Chapter and Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood (UHPP) hosted the 5th Annual Faith and Choice Forum in April. The Rev. Katherine Ragsdale, executive director of Political Research Associates, addressed a standing-room only crowd. The University at Albany's VOX Chapter was recognized for their outstanding campus organizing work at UHPP's Annual Meeting on May 17.

Students from Adelphi University, C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University, Hofstra University and St. John's University participated in focus groups to help Planned Parenthood of Nassau County develop a successful public affairs agenda.

From the Hill and Beyond

Supreme Court to Hear Abortion Ban Cases

The US Supreme Court announced that it will hear *Gonzales v. Planned Parenthood*, a case that challenges the federal abortion ban law. The Court had already agreed to hear *Gonzales v. Carhart*, another challenge to the law. Both cases will probably be considered together and will be heard in the fall.

Senate Fails to Advance Gay Marriage Amendment

The US Senate rejected a vote on the so-called "Marriage Protection" Amendment by a vote of 49-48. This bill would have defined marriage as only between a man and a woman, and would have been the only constitutional amendment to limit the rights of Americans. Family Planning Advocates' Board of Directors is proud to have issued a strong statement opposing such proposals and supporting the rights of same sex couples.

HPV Vaccine Approved

The federal Food and Drug Administration approved the first vaccine developed to protect women against cervical cancer. The vaccine, which works by building immunity against the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus (HPV), was found to be effective in preventing almost three-quarters of all cervical cancers. Gardasil, developed by Merck, is expected to have a dramatic effect on the health of women worldwide.

Senator Frist Withdraws Dangerous Amendment

The so-called Child Custody Protection Act (CCPA), known as the Teen Endangerment Act, was filed as an amendment to the Department of Defense Authorization bill in June. Ultimately, Senator Frist withdrew the CCPA amendment in favor of other amendments. This dangerous and complex legislation, which would prohibit adults from assisting certain young people in need of abortion services, remains a priority of the Congressional Republicans.

Louisiana Approves Trigger Law

Louisiana passed a trigger law which would criminalize abortions in the state if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned in the courts. Governor Kathleen Blanco signed the law even though the legislature failed to provide exceptions for rape and incest.

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New York Needs Real Sex Education

Shelby Knox: New York is Not So Different from Texas

The subject of the award-winning documentary, *The Education of Shelby Knox*, met with teens, clergy and legislators in Albany in support of the Healthy Teens Act. Prior to her visit, screenings of the film, which won rave reviews at the Sundance Film Festival, were offered by Family Planning Advocates and Planned Parenthoods throughout New York.

The Education of Shelby Knox followed Shelby's efforts to bring comprehensive sex education to her high school in Lubbock, Texas. Lubbock has some of the highest rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection in the nation and yet schools in the district continue to fund failed abstinence-only sex education programs — not unlike New York.

Shelby was a terrific advocate for the Healthy Teens Act. Her experience as a deeply religious young person complemented the wisdom of leaders of many faiths who advocated for comprehensive sex education on FPA's annual Clergy Day. Now in college, her work to help promote sex education for young people has taken a national focus.



Shelby Knox joined clergy from around New York to discuss the need for medically accurate sex education with state legislators. Pictured above are Rev. Gary Doupe of Binghamton, Rev. Tom Davis of Saratoga Springs, Ingrid Husisian of Planned Parenthood of South Central New York, and Rabbi Linda Henry Goodman of Brooklyn.



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