Health Reform Provision Secures $250 Million for Abstinence Education

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A provision in the health care reform bill signed into law last week restores $250 million over five years for states to sponsor abstinence-only-until-marriage sex education programs, *The Washington Post* reports. Such programming was slated to lose all federal funding under President Barack Obama's first two budgets.

"We're very happy to see that funding will continue so the important sexual health message of risk avoidance will reach American teens," said Valerie Huber, executive director of DC-based lobbying group, the National Abstinence Education Association. "What better place to see such an important health issue addressed than in the health legislation?"

Critics of this funding restoration cite recent data that prove abstinence education programs are ineffective in preventing unwanted teen pregnancies and transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

"To spend a quarter-billion dollars on abstinence-only-until-marriage programs that have already been proven to fail is reckless and irresponsible," said James Wagoner of the DC group Advocates for Youth. "When on top of that you add the fact that this puts the health and lives of young people at risk, this becomes outrageous."

During former president George W. Bush's administration, abstinence-until-marriage programs received more than $100 million annually in direct federal funding and about $50 million each year in federal funding funneled through the states.

The health care reform legislation also includes $75 million annually over five years for a new "personal responsibility education" program, which would fund programs that teach young people about abstinence and contraception, including condoms. As such, Huber said, abstinence-only programs would not likely be eligible for these funds.

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