

Dolores Huerta Foundation



FRESNO BARRIOS UNIDOS
Serving Families to a Healthier

 **Planned Parenthood**
Mar Monte



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Contacts:

Patsy Montgomery, Planned Parenthood Mar Monte – (559) 360-4309 (cell)/ (559) 488-4908 x 301
Rocio Córdoba, California Latinas for Reproductive Justice – (213) 270-5258 (cell) (English/Spanish)
Ana Sandoval, Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California – (916) 446-5247 x115

**CENTRAL VALLEY PARENTS, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS CITE
URGENT NEED FOR QUALITY SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

Coalition of Latina/o Community Members and Health Advocates Call on Governor to Promote Healthy Communities and Support Legislation that would Ensure Medically Accurate Sexual Health Programs

CENTRAL VALLEY, CA – Citing the critical need to address disproportionately high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and teen births in the region, a coalition of parents, youth, community leaders and reproductive health advocates spanning the Central Valley joined forces to seek support for quality sexual health education programs in their communities. Representatives of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, Fresno Barrios Unidos, Sex Ed Nation and California Latinas for Reproductive Justice, among other community leaders, urged the Governor to support a state bill (AB 629) that would ensure that state funded sexual health programs are medically accurate, effective, culturally and linguistically appropriate and tailored to meet community needs.

AB 629 (Brownley), *The Sexual Health Education Accountability Act*, would promote healthy California communities by ensuring that local pregnancy and STD (sexually transmitted disease) prevention education programs are accurate, effective and unbiased. This bill is designed to support flexible, community-based sexual health education programs while ensuring that public funds are spent responsibly in communities with the greatest needs.

Many communities of color, rural communities and low-income communities in California continue to experience inequitable access to timely health services and information, as well as disproportionately high rates of teen pregnancies and STDs. For example, Central Valley counties have among the highest rates of STDs in California. According to state estimates, Fresno and Sacramento Counties have the first and second highest rates of Chlamydia (at 581 and 549 per 100,000, respectively) while Fresno and Kern Counties have among the highest rates of Gonorrhea (at 161 and 160, respectively). Senate district 16 -- which includes parts of Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera and Tulare Counties -- has the highest rate of teen births (at 84.6 per 1,000).

Californians overwhelmingly support the medically accurate, comprehensive sexuality education that AB 629 would require. A recent survey of California parents conducted by the Public Health Institute found that 89% of California parents – including 89% of Central Valley parents and 90% of Latino/a parents -- support comprehensive sexuality education. This support is consistent across racial and ethnic groups, religious affiliations and California regions.

“Now is the time to take action and make sure all Central Valley communities have access to quality sexual health education programs,” said Camila Chavez, Executive Director of the Dolores Huerta Foundation. “In our organizing work, Latina/o parents have expressed the need and desire for medically accurate and culturally-based sexuality education programs. They would like this information to be available to parents and youth in order to empower them to make well-informed decisions about their health.”

Despite this overwhelming support for sexuality education, scarce public dollars for community-based sexual health education currently fund some biased, inaccurate and ineffective programs that deny young people the facts they need to protect their health.

“We cannot control our youth's actions with fear. We need to trust them with medically accurate and unbiased education,” said Socorro Santillan, Fresno Barrios Unidos Executive Director. “We demand honesty and truth from our youth. They shouldn't receive anything less from us.”

“Californians expect any state-funded health program to be science-based, straightforward and effective. We wouldn't let ideologues hijack and distort a statewide campaign to reduce childhood obesity. We should hold our teen pregnancy and STI HIV/AIDS programs to the same basic standards,” said Maggie Crosby, staff attorney with the ACLU of Northern California.

“Comprehensive sexuality education is an essential component of advancing the reproductive and sexual health of Latina/o youth and the Latina/o community as a whole. This is especially important for low-income communities of color who experience inequitable access to health care, health disparities, systemic discrimination and poverty – all barriers to quality reproductive and sexual health information and services,” said Rocio Córdoba, Executive Director of California Latinas for Reproductive Justice. “We know that the Latina/o community strongly supports comprehensive sexuality education. We also know that quality programs tailored to meet the needs of their community work. As such, we urge the Governor to sign AB 629 when it reaches his desk and ensure that Central Valley communities have access to quality sexual health programs – not ineffective abstinence-only programs that fail to provide young people with the information they need to protect their health and promote positive future opportunities.”

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Note to assignment editors: Spanish-speaking representatives will be available for interviews.