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November 28, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama  
233 N Michigan Avenue, 11<sup>th</sup> floor  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Dear President-Elect Obama:

As you begin to prioritize the many tasks that lie before you at this historic time, we write on behalf of the millions of students who receive abstinence education. We write as Democrats, as Republicans, as Independents committed to moving beyond the partisan rhetoric that has mischaracterized abstinence education for too long. We also write from our experience working with youth in urban, rural, and suburban neighborhoods. And the stories we hear from them are compelling. They tell us that until abstinence education programs (as currently funded by Congress) came to their school, no one gave them the tools they needed to abstain from sex. Many tell us that even though they had sex in the past, now they are going to wait because of newfound confidence in themselves as a result of abstinence programs. They embody the "yes we can" message enthusiastically!

Millions of youth across the United States are making better health decisions because of the skills they learn in their abstinence education classes. A growing body of research provides compelling evidence that youth who receive abstinence education are significantly less likely to initiate sexual activity as their peers. Sexually experienced students are more likely to discontinue their sexual activity as a result of the skills and encouragement received in abstinence education classes. We cannot turn our backs on this promising evidence just as our youth are responding to the positive message of abstinence as never before.

Research also shows that those students who were a part of an abstinence program, but go on to become sexually active, are no less likely to use a condom than their peers, but still have fewer partners. We know that limiting lifetime partners is important to decreasing the spread of STDs, but avoiding sexual activity is the only way to completely avoid the risk. Beyond the physical consequences, however, there are also significant potential emotional consequences to adolescent sexual activity. Abstinence education helps teens avoid these negative, emotional outcomes by empowering them to make decisions that benefit their overall health.

Abstinence is a message that resonates with youth. More and more teens are choosing to abstain but continued support for this initiative is essential given the highly sexualized culture in which they live.

We are writing because like you, we care about the youth of America. We hope you will agree that this must not be a partisan issue. With President Clinton signing Title V abstinence education into law and President Bush signing SPRANS-CBAE abstinence education into law, it is clear that concern for youth crosses both sides of the aisle. It is a public health message that deserves to be continued. As you so aptly stated in your acceptance speech, "we rise or fall as one nation, as one people. Let's resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long". We ask that this be the first campaign promise that you keep. We respectfully ask that you put aside the misinformation you've undoubtedly received about abstinence education and allow for an informed discussion of the facts to determine this important public health policy for our youth. We hope that you will listen and acknowledge the youth who have embraced new opportunities as a result of their abstinence education programs.

We cordially ask that we can meet in order to begin a meaningful and nonpartisan conversation around this issue. We look forward to continuing the important gains that have been made in keeping youth healthy through abstinence education.

Sincerely,