

Although federal funding guidelines do not permit abstinence-only grantees to convey overt religious messages or to impose religious viewpoints, in practice, many of these programs do precisely that. For example, in *ACLU v. Leavitt*, the ACLU showed how federal dollars were supporting an overtly religious abstinence-only program called The Silver Ring Thing, which had been awarded more than \$1 million dollars in federal money in the prior three years.

During the Silver Ring Thing's flagship three-hour program, members testified that accepting Jesus Christ improved their lives, quoted Bible passages, and urged audience members to ask the Lord Jesus Christ to come into their lives. As a result of the ACLU's lawsuit, federal officials suspended federal funding of the Silver Ring Thing. And, in February 2006, the ACLU announced a settlement with HHS, under which HHS agreed that it would not fund the program as currently structured.

Most recently, in May 2007, the ACLU expressed concern to HHS about the misuse of abstinence-only funds by two grantees funded by the federal Community Based Abstinence Education Program (CBAE). Specifically, one Oregon grantee created the *Stop and Think* abstinence program and contracted with another grantee to teach the program in various venues across the country. In order to use the program, the second grantee had to sign a contract containing the following conditions:

- 1) The presenter and supervisor
 - a) possess an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ
 - b) possess knowledge of the word of God, and the ability to communicate it's [sic] truth
 - c) exhibit a loving and merciful spirit
 - d) attend a Bible believing local church or fellowship

This contract was provided to HHS as part of the second grantee's application for CBAE funding. Moreover, an advertisement by one of the grantees for a full-time abstinence director "responsible for overall implementation of the *Stop & Think* [program]" directed applicants to send a resume and "letter of Christian testimony."

A direct grant of government dollars violates the Constitution when it is used to fund specifically religious activities. In the cited circumstances, one grantee required, and another agreed, that all presenters of the federally funded *Stop and Think* program hold particular religious beliefs. Additionally, proselytization was an essential component of the *Stop and Think* program and the program contained religious or sectarian messages. As a result of the ACLU's complaint, HHS conducted investigations of both grantees and reported that the Oregon grantee would require "all abstinence education program staff to sign a statement of understanding that they may not proselytize while working with any federally funded program." In addition, HHS found that though the other grantee, which had been organi

Abstinence-only Programs Censor Information

Statistics reveal that teens need information about contraception and sexual health: nearly two-thirds of all high school seniors in the U.S. have had sexual intercourse; approximately 822,000 pregnancies occurred among 15-19 year old women in 2000; and each year, approximately 9.1 million 15-24 year olds are infected with sexually transmitted infections.

However, recipients of abstinence-only funds are censored in the information they can provide to students. Federal funding can be used solely to offer programs with the “exclusive purpose” of teaching the benefits of abstinence programs. In the context of these programs, grantees may not provide a participating adolescent with any information that is inconsistent with the narrow eight-point definition of abstinence-only education. These programs thus leave teens without

with officials at ACF in order to ensure that particularly problematic curricula identified in its letter were either corrected or no longer funded. While the entity that produced one of those curricula, *Teen-Aid Inc.*, is no longer a CBAE grantee, the other, *Why kNOw*, continues to receive federal funds. Some improvements to the *Why kNOw* materials were made after our complaint. But, as we have advised HHS, serious inaccuracies remain—despite HHS’s assurances that it reviews for, and demands, medical accuracy in all grantees’ educational materials. Thus, it is clear that HHS is unable, or simply unwilling, to ensure that abstinence-only grantees satisfy minimum standards of scientific and medical accuracy.

Congress should not support the dissemination of medically inaccurate and misleading information. Rather, it should fund programs that provide teens with medically accurate and complete information about abstinence as well as contraceptives.

Abstinence-Only Programs are Ineffective

There is no conclusive evidence that abstinence-only programs, which teach students to abstain from sex until married and generally only teach about contraceptive failure, reduce the rate of unintended pregnancy or STDs.

Moreover, studies show that most abstinence-only programs do not help teens delay having sex, and some show evidence that these programs actually deter teens who become sexually active from protecting themselves from unintended pregnancy or STDs.

In April 2007, a long-awaited study by Mathematica Policy Research Inc., on behalf of HHS, showed that abstinence-only programs don't work. This congressionally commissioned study, *Impacts of Four Title V, Secti*

Indeed, a study of Ohio abstinence-only programs concluded, “one of the greatest flaws of abstinence programs is their inherent exclusion of [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender]