Planned Parenthood of New York City Testimony on
Sexual Harassment in the Workplace
before the
NYC Council Committee on Women and Committee on Civil and Human Rights
February 28, 2018

Good afternoon. I am Christina Chang, Vice President of Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC). I am pleased to submit testimony for today’s public hearing on sexual harassment in the workplace. Thank you to the New York City Council Committee Chairs Helen Rosenthal and Mathieu Eugene convening today’s hearing and to the Speaker of the Council and the Committees on Women and Civil and Human Rights for bringing to light this important issue.

Planned Parenthood of New York City has been a leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services in New York City for more than 100 years, reaching nearly 85,000 New Yorkers annually through our clinical and education programs. In addition to our clinical services, PPNYC has a robust education department, providing both youth and adult education programs to more than 25,000 New Yorkers annually. Our programs aim to provide tools to help our participants lead sexually healthy, safe and responsible lives. All of our health curricula include a healthy relationship and consent component and seeks to create an affirming space for all members of our community to thrive.

In this political moment, public conversations on sexual harassment are more important than ever. The #MeToo movement has brought to light the extent to which sexual harassment, assault, and the devaluing of women pervades our society. No workplace or institution is free from these realities and we are just beginning to take a hard look at the societal systems in place that enable such continued abuse. We applaud the Council for taking an important step in convening this hearing to examine the gaps that persist in workplaces across New York City and to begin to act on opportunities for change.

PPNYC strongly supports measures to combat sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace. Sexual assault is a matter of public health and safety. Survivors frequently face physical and or mental trauma and suffer high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and drug or alcohol abuse. The repercussions are often grave and long lasting. PPNYC works to meet the needs of survivors in our clinical services as well as our education and advocacy work. Our medical history forms include nonjudgmental screening questions for intimate partner violence and sexual and reproductive wellbeing. We provide onsite social workers, as well as, referrals to nearby family justice centers or additional services as needed. Our staff assesses for level of danger and immediacy of support needed and offers care accordingly.

In order for employees to be able to do their job effectively, they need to feel safe. And they need to feel their employer stands with them and values their wellbeing. PPNYC provides staff with routine training on sexual harassment in the workplace, in addition to regular patient privacy and safety protocols, and supports greater resources dedicated to trainings, such as bystander intervention. As a leading health education provider in New York City, we know firsthand how important education, training, and prevention is to addressing sexual harassment. Our staff provide workshops and professional development

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to adults, caregivers, and employees, because people of all ages need education and resources when it comes to healthy relationships, consent, and respectful communication. PPNYC supports the call to require anti-sexual harassment training in our workplaces so employees know their rights when it comes to sexual harassment and assault and are equipped with the tools and knowledge to identify and report harassment. Conversely, managers and employers need training to understand their responsibilities in preventing sexual harassment and the measures they can take to respond to and address complaints. As we begin to see more individuals come forward, we need to ensure employees have the support and resources to be able to report without being subjected to undue retaliation or retribution.

However, these resources should not just be limited to places of employment.

New Yorkers, particularly women and transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) individuals, experience sexual harassment long before they enter the workforce. It is incumbent on us as a city to address the extent of sexual harassment we experience in our daily lives and take steps to create environments to help prevent sexual harassment from occurring in the first place. A core component of combating and preventing harassment requires an increased commitment to comprehensive sexuality education. PPNYC firmly believes that conversations around harassment, consent, and understanding what a healthy relationship looks like cannot start early enough.

Comprehensive sexuality education encompasses lessons and skill development around bodily autonomy, respect, identifying healthy relationships, anti-bullying measures and bystander intervention, and safe sexual practices, all critical tools in helping young people to identify sexual harassment and assault and influence how they see themselves and their sexuality in positive ways. Starting these lessons in elementary grades is imperative; students who receive comprehensive sexuality education guided by the National Sexuality Education Standards (NSES) learn:

- “The characteristics of healthy friendships and healthy ways to express feelings by 2nd grade;
- How to compare healthy and unhealthy relationships, communicate differences of opinions while maintaining friendships, and demonstrate ways to treat others with dignity and respect by the end of 5th grade;
- How to describe the potential impact of power differentials in relationships, analyze the similarities and differences between friendships and romantic relationships, communicate personal boundaries and show respect for the boundaries of others by 8th grade;
- How to describe the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy romantic and sexual relationships, analyze the media’s influence on how people define healthy relationships, describe and explain consent, effectively communicate personal boundaries, and demonstrate effective strategies to avoid or end an unhealthy relationship by the end of 12th grade.”

Research has consistently shown that comprehensive sexual health education works. Positive youth development education, that focuses on the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of sexuality is crucial in helping young people to make health-promoting decisions and can help shift

3 “Enhancing the Emotional and Social Skills of the Youth to Promote their Wellbeing and Positive Development: A Systematic Review of Universal School-based Randomized Controlled Trials.” Clin Pract Epidemiol Ment Health.
broader cultural ideas about gender, power, and sexuality. A recent college survey found that when repeatedly exposed to sexual double standard messages from family and peers, female students were less likely to be comfortable with sexual communication than their peers were, male students had higher rates of perpetuating sexual coercion, and both male and female students had higher rates of endorsing rape “myths.” Truly comprehensive education requires that we unpack gender and power dynamics in relationships and foster critical thinking about gender norms and stereotypes in our everyday lives and what it means to value oneself and recognize one’s own power. Curriculum that centers gender and power in sexuality education would go a long way to challenging the deeply embedded culture of sexual harassment unearthed by the #MeToo movement.

Efforts to combat sexual harassment and assault in the workplace are needed more than ever. We know that reports of harassment and assault are not new, and with this renewed awareness and call for action, we have an unprecedented opportunity to move forward bold large-scale changes. These efforts must include workplace education, resources, support services. And they need to start well before individuals enter the workforce. Comprehensive, inclusive sexual health education from kindergarten to 12th grade enables schools to build a foundation for much-needed learning around sexual harassment and assault in age-appropriate ways, and supports young people to build caring communities that respect the identities of all. We applaud the Council’s commitment to address current rates of sexual harassment in the workplace and urge the city to advance comprehensive sexual health education citywide. To that end, please find attached the Sexuality Education Alliance of New York City (SEANYC)’s policy recommendations for enacting comprehensive sexual health education for all New York students.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.
