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FEDS SPEND \$1 BILLION ON UNPROVEN ABSTINENCE-ONLY SEX EDUCATION Healthy Teens Act Would Fund Age-Appropriate, Medically Accurate Sex Education for New York

Albany, NY (June 14, 2005)—A report on abstinence-only sex education programs fails to justify the \$1 billion spent by the federal government on these programs. The long-delayed interim report evaluating 4 of the more than 900 federally-funded abstinence-only programs across the nation was released today by Mathematica Policy Research. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-commissioned report found that “none of the sites individually show evidence of having increased youth’s expectations to remain abstinent.”

“This evaluation raises serious concerns about federal spending on programs that have not been proven effective in delaying sexual activity, or reducing unintended pregnancy and STI among teens,” said JoAnn Smith, president and CEO of Family Planning Advocates of New York State. “New York State should devote precious resources to real sex education programs that give young people the information they need to make vital choices.”

New York received more than \$9.3 million from the federal government for abstinence-only sex education programs – the second highest amount in the nation (only Texas receives more). The State spent an additional \$2.6 million in matching funds for these programs. New York has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the country: nearly 40,000 teen pregnancies were reported in 2003.

Smith said that implementation of the “Healthy Teens Act” would be a far better investment of taxpayer dollars to reduce unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI) among youth. The Healthy Teens Act would provide funding to school districts and community-based organizations to support age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education programs. The legislation (A.6619b), authored by Assemblymember Richard Gottfried (D-Manhattan), passed the Assembly with tremendous bipartisan support on June 7, 2005. Senator Nicholas Spano sponsors the bill (S.5121) in the Senate.

Comprehensive sex education programs that include messages about both abstinence and contraception -- like those that would be supported by the Healthy Teens Act -- have been found to be effective in delaying the onset of sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing contraceptive and condom use. These findings were confirmed by a June 2001 report issued by the Surgeon General of the United States and are supported by the major medical organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Society for Adolescent Medicine, and the American Nurses Association.

More than 100 organizations and 10,000 individual New Yorkers have joined the effort to provide young people with real sex education by supporting the Get the Facts NY campaign. Additional information about the need for comprehensive sex education in New York can be found at www.getthefactsny.org.