Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 18, 2005

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

On December 1, 2004, the minority staff of the Government Reform Committee released a report entitled *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence Education Programs*.[1] The report found that 11 of 13 popular federally funded "abstinence only" curricula provided false and misleading information about contraceptives, taught erroneous information on the effects of abortion, blurred religion and science, presented gender stereotypes as scientific facts, or made basic errors in biology.

In response, Dr. Alma Golden of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) stated, "These issues have been raised before and discredited."[2] However, HHS did not provide additional information about where these issues "have been raised before" or how they have been "discredited." It is also not apparent that there is any significant review of the content of "abstinence only" curricula before they receive federal funding and reach millions of youth.

Abstinence-only education will receive $167 million in federal funding in fiscal year 2005. However, HHS appears to have postponed from 2004 to 2006 the release of a planned evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs.[3]

We request that GAO review the processes within HHS for determining the accuracy and evaluating the effects of "abstinence-only" education. Specifically, we request that GAO:

- Assess whether HHS has, in the past, reviewed the content of materials used in "abstinence only" programs to determine that they are scientifically accurate;

- Assess whether HHS is currently reviewing the content of materials used in "abstinence only" programs to determine that they are scientifically accurate;

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[1] Minority Staff, Government Reform Committee, *The Content of Federally Funded Abstinence Education Programs* (Dec. 2004).

[2] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Statement by Alma Golden, M.D., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs, Office of Public Health and Science Regarding Abstinence Education Report of the House Committee on Government Reform* (Dec. 1, 2004).

[3] *Bush Wants More Money for Abstinence Education While Awaiting Evidence It Works*, Associated Press (Nov. 25, 2004).

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- If HHS is reviewing whether "abstinence only" curricula are scientifically accurate, assess the quality of this review, including whether this review is undertaken by qualified, unbiased scientists;

- Provide your own assessment of whether there are valid concerns about the scientific accuracy of the information taught in popular "abstinence-only" curricula;

- Assess the quality of ongoing HHS efforts to evaluate the outcomes of "abstinence-only" programs, including whether these evaluations are being conducted by qualified, unbiased scientists and whether the programs are representative of all abstinence-only grantees.

- Determine whether HHS has postponed releasing any information on its evaluation of "abstinence only" programs from 2004 to 2006. If this delay did occur, assess whether it was justified.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives

Fortney Pete Stark
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives

Sherrod Brown
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives

Barbara Lee
Chair
Global AIDS Initiative
Congressional Black Caucus
U.S. House of Representatives

Howard L. Berman
Member of Congress

Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress

Lois Capps
Member of Congress

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Tom Harkin
United States Senator

Jon S. Corzine
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

James M. Jeffords
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Russell D. Feingold
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator