

ACLU targets abstinence-only programs

18-state effort aims to persuade officials to spurn federal grants

By Cheryl Wetzstein
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The American Civil Liberties Union yesterday began a campaign to urge officials in 18 states to reject abstinence-only sex-education programs.

Many abstinence programs contain false or misleading information, discriminate against homosexual youth and promote religion, ACLU leaders said, citing a December report issued by Rep. Henry A. Waxman, California Democrat.

The effort began as Maine announced that it had become the third state to reject federal abstinence-education funding, because of new rules that con-

flict with state policy.

Maine officials said this week that they will forgo a grant offered through the 1996 welfare-reform law because it must be used for abstinence programs and because they prefer comprehensive sex education. They used the grants for abstinence ad campaigns before the rules change.

"This money is more harmful than it is good," Dr. Dora Anne Mills, director of Maine's Bu-

reau of Health, told the Portland Press Herald. "You can't talk about comprehensive reproductive information."

She said Maine didn't take \$165,000 in Title V abstinence grants offered in fiscal 2005 and would not take the \$161,000 that becomes available Oct. 1 for fiscal 2006. Pennsylvania and California also have rejected the grants.

"Maine likes to be in the lead in a lot of things, and I think this

is one of these times when we have," Lynn Kippax, press secretary for Maine Gov. John Baldacci, a Democrat, said yesterday.

Abstinence-only programs define abstinence as "avoiding all genital contact and sexual stimulation" and teach teens how to set boundaries and practice self-control, said Libby Gray Macke, director of Project Reality in Glenview, Ill.

In contrast, comprehensive

sex programs teach a "complete range" of behaviors, including oral sex and mutual masturbation, as alternatives to intercourse, she said. However, these behaviors put teens at risk for sexually transmitted diseases.

The states targeted by the ACLU are Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ne-

braska, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Wyoming.

Pennsylvania and California do not accept Title V abstinence funds, but last year, organizations in the two states received more than \$10 million from other federal abstinence funds, according to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States.

Meanwhile, abstinence supporters are hoping Congress soon will boost abstinence funding to a record \$206 million, as proposed by the Bush administration.

They also are criticizing comprehensive-sex advocates for helping push the teen oral-sex rate to higher than 50 percent.