

# Abstinence education gains record funding

By Cheryl Wetzstein  
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The federal government's investment in abstinence education should reach a record high of about \$120 million this year.

The funding, which includes \$117 million in ongoing programs and about \$3.5 million in one-time earmarks to specific programs, is welcomed by proponents of abstinence education.

"This is as high as it's ever been," said Heritage Foundation analyst Robert Rector.

The goal, he said, remains at least \$135 million a year, which would put abstinence funding on par with spending for contraceptive education.

President Bush tried to reach \$135 million by budgeting \$73 million for one abstinence grant program. Congress funded it at \$55 million instead.

Two veteran abstinence programs — Project Reality, based in Golf, Ill., and the Best Friends Foundation in the District — received earmarks of \$100,000 and \$250,000, respectively. Both will use the money for programs in the District.

The other \$3.2 million is going to 31 programs in Pennsylvania.

"Abstinence education is very

valuable in promoting a viable alternative to sexual activity" and can reduce the risks of unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease and single parenthood, said Sen. Arlen Specter, who pushed for the earmarks with fellow Pennsylvania Republican Sen. Rick Santorum.

The new spending dismays supporters of comprehensive sex education who last year called for no new money for abstinence programs.

The funding — especially the earmarks — sets a bad precedent, said Kate Bowen Smith of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States.

"We are ignoring our young people's need for accurate and complete information by investing in unproven abstinence programs," she said.

Some abstinence supporters have caveats for the funding.

Leslee Unruh, founder of the Abstinence Clearinghouse in Sioux Falls, S.D., said funding should not go to programs that focus little on abstinence due to having other agendas such as dealing with substance abuse.

A program can have those other aspects, she said, "but I want to see 75 percent [of the focus] on abstinence until marriage."

Mrs. Unruh also was concerned that some faith-based programs might not understand how accepting

## ABSTINENCE FUNDING

The federal government is investing slightly more than \$120 million in abstinence programs this year, a record amount.

### Included in the omnibus spending bill, signed Feb. 20:

■ \$12 million for the Title XX Adolescent Family Life Act. This is up from \$10 million in previous years.

■ \$55 million for the Special Programs of Regional and National Significance-Community Based Abstinence Education. This is up from \$40 million last year.

### Special "earmark" grants:

■ \$250,000 to the Best Friends Foundation of Washington, D.C., to develop a local youth program.

■ \$100,000 to Project Reality of Golf, Ill., to run the "Game Plan" abstinence program in Washington, D.C., schools.

■ \$700,000 to Silver Ring Thing of Sewickley, Pa., to expand its program of giving rings and abstinence education to teenagers.

■ \$2.5 million to 30 Pennsylvania school districts, agencies and community groups for abstinence education.

### Separately, in pending welfare reform bills:

■ \$50 million a year for five years to the Title V Abstinence Education Grant Program. This is the same amount as in previous years.

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government funding impacts them.

"With the federal dollars comes a huge responsibility to walk that line," she said. "I'm all for passing out Bibles, but you can't do that with federal money."

The Silver Ring Thing in Sewickley, Pa., which won a \$700,000 grant, teaches abstinence in school assemblies, said founder Denny Pattyn. The program has a secular part and an optional faith-based part. Students who want to commit to abstinence can buy their own silver ring and a Bible for \$12, he said.

The new funding, Mr. Pattyn

added, will be used to take the program to other cities.

The Urban Family Council in Philadelphia, which won \$126,000, plans to use its new funds to expand its fatherhood program and teach single fathers the benefits of "saving sex for marriage," said Betty Jean Wolfe, council president.

The federal government funds abstinence education through three programs. Its total funding was \$80 million in 2001 and \$100 million in 2002. Once welfare reform is renewed, 2003 funding should reach \$117 million.