

THE PROSPECTOR

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OPTIONS OUT OF REACH

Contraceptive access discussion unfolds amid high unprotected teenage sex rates

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**name changed for confidentiality*

“You’re a dirty slut who needs to burn in hell.” These were the words screamed at senior *Juliet Rockwell as she nervously waited outside a free clinic, a facility where one can get an abortion, contraceptives and other services, during her junior year. The man who screamed at her was wearing a shirt that read, “Abortion is murder done by slutty whores,” and Rockwell says that she will forever remember this as the scariest moment in her life. Not only was she getting her “first and only abortion” that day, she also feared for her life due to the eight protesters standing outside the clinic: two of them armed with handguns holstered at their sides.

As she walked into the facility, Rockwell could not feel worse about the procedure that she was about to undergo. While she is pro-choice politically when it comes to the abortion debate, Rockwell says that getting an abortion is not a procedure one should be excited about.

“The biggest misconception [of the pro-choice argument] is that we’re all baby killers that enjoy abortions,” Rockwell said.

“No sane person wants abortions to happen. The hard truth is that many times they are the best way for women to deal with an unwanted pregnancy.”

Rockwell became pregnant after becoming sexually active with her boyfriend, and while she was well aware that sex could lead to pregnancy, she believed that her boyfriend using a condom would be enough protection. Rockwell was not on birth control because her parents’ strong Roman Catholic faith influenced their decisions in not taking her to a doctor to get the prescription for it. Furthermore, she has a phone that is tracked with the app Life360 and no driver’s license — meaning that she could not get to a free clinic that would provide it either.

Because of the difficulty in accessing birth control that teens in Rockwell’s situation can experience, she and pro-life junior James Pomian both agree that public high schools should go to greater lengths of providing contraceptives to teenagers if they seek it. Considering that Rockwell’s abortion “nearly destroyed her mentally” and Pomian is a person who wants all abortions to end due to his pro-life beliefs, they both agree that this is a common sense reform.

“I know that people are [having sex] because that’s part of teenage life in America and in the world these days,” Pomian said. “The result of [sex] is pregnancy, and so I’m pro-protection because ... [pregnancy is] the obvious result of sex.”

While Rockwell and Pomian both think that expanding contraceptive access is the clear solution, they are both cognizant of the fact that there is strong opposition to the use of birth control due to the various religious ideals.

As previously stated, Rockwell’s family members are devout Roman Catholics and because of their church’s stance of calling contraception “[intrinsically evil](#),” her par-

ents refused to allow her to use birth control.

“My family is very, very Catholic,” Rockwell said. “Asking to be put on birth control was scary because it goes against our [religious] faith entirely. Saying that to my mom was the equivalent of asking a vegetarian to eat a Big Mac.”

However, Pomian is [Pentecostal](#), and his faith deems the use of birth control a “moral choice,” according to the [Center for American Progress](#). Because of the different stances within the sects of Christianity, Rockwell views the idea of increasing contraceptive access to teenagers as “a touchy subject that takes civil discussion to get anything done.”

This civil discussion would include people from both sides of the contraception argument, and according to Prospect parent

*Martin Welsh, teenagers using contraceptives are morally wrong. Welsh believes this for not only his personal beliefs, but also his religious beliefs as a Roman Catholic.

“Teenagers shouldn’t be having sex,” Welsh said. “I get the whole, ‘If they’re going to do it, they might as well have protection’ thing, but they just shouldn’t be having sex to begin with. We shouldn’t be teaching our kids to have sex; we should be teaching them to abstain.”

While Pomian agrees with Welsh’s belief of abstaining from sex until marriage, he still believes that public high schools should do anything they can to prevent unwanted pregnancies that could lead to abortions.

Illinois state Sen. [Ann Gillespie](#) also agrees with Pomian’s viewpoint and references the data that was seen after the passing of the Affordable Care Act ([ACA](#)) in 2010.

Gillespie mentions the ACA because, according to the Center for American Progress, the ACA’s [contraceptive mandate](#) saved women \$1.4 billion in out-of-pocket insurance costs after it was passed.

“The lesson that the Affordable Care Act shows us [is that] the rate of abortion [went down](#) after [its] implementation,” Gillespie said in an interview with The Prospector. “People had access to coverage for contraceptives that they had not had before.”

55.0%

OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE SEXUALLY ACTIVE

**information courtesy of the CDC*

55.3%

OF PROSPECT STUDENTS ARE SEXUALLY ACTIVE

75.8%

OF SEXUALLY ACTIVE STUDENTS DO NOT USE PROTECTION

SEE **PROTECTION**, page 2.

**information courtesy of a Prospector survey of 255 students*

photo illustration by Mara Nicolaie

PROTECTION:

Discussing ethical, moral solutions

CONTINUED from front page

Despite these statistics, Rockwell explains that receiving the benefits of free contraceptives as a teenager is only possible if a student can get to a free clinic by themselves and know of a safe place to go to. As a junior in high school she knew where to go because of the information that was given to her during the sex education unit in Health Education, but she had no way to get to a free clinic that was 10 miles away or a [Planned Parenthood](#) facility.

Although she was never able to access the local clinics where she could get birth control for free, Rockwell feels very fortunate for the extensive sex education unit because of how informative it truly was. She was expecting an entire lecture about how abstinence is the only way, but her teacher gave a very in-depth lesson that discussed how and where students can get contraceptives in the event that they are sexually active while also thoroughly covering the risks of sex.

Rockwell describes this as a “safe sex” unit, but Health Education teacher Aaron Marnstein states that “safe sex” is actually a misleading term due to the fact that any sex — no matter what protection is used — can result in [pregnancy or the transmission of STIs](#). Marnstein also likes to clarify that the sex education unit does not promote students being sexually active; it simply gives students all the information to protect themselves.

“What the crux of teaching about contraception ends up being is teaching students to make their own decisions,” Marnstein said. “[They need] to make the decision that is best for them, and everybody makes different decisions [and] decides to do different things at different times.”

One of the ways Marnstein and the other Health Education teachers give students resources is by listing locations where free contraceptives are available in the [local area](#).

However, parents like Welsh do not like the fact that educators are teaching about contraceptives and where to access them. However, he understands that a public high school has every right to provide this sort of education — hence why he has never objected to this unit but made sure his children were not present in the classroom when this unit was taught.

According to Marnstein, if a parent does not wish to have their student learn the sex education unit from the Prospect teachers like Welsh did, they can inform the teacher and the student will be removed from the classroom and given a different health assignment to complete.

However, Rockwell found these resources helpful and wrote them down for reference, but she also found that Planned Parenthood is another great organization to turn to. Rockwell likes to emphasize that [Planned Parenthood](#) offers more than abortion services, and is a crucial health care location for free contraceptives and other major medical examinations.

“[Planned Parenthood] should be praised for their work,” Illinois Sen. [Tammy Duckworth](#) said in a statement to The Prospector. “[They are responsible for] providing hundreds of thousands of cervical and breast cancer screenings, performing over 4.2 million tests and treatments for sexually transmitted infections and providing education and outreach to 1.5 million young people and adults each year.”

While Pomian firmly opposes the [abortion services](#) that Planned Parenthood offers, he still supports some of their other policies. In particular, he is happy that they provide free or low-cost birth control to people who are uninsured or underinsured by their health care provider. Because of their desire for teens to have easier contraceptive access, Pomian and Rockwell believe that having [Prospect provide](#) contraceptives to their students if they ask for it is another good way to allow students to be safe when they are sexually active. In addition, a Prospector survey of 255 students shows that 82.1% of students also believe that Prospect should provide

contraceptives to students.

With 55.3% of students being sexually active and only 24.2% of those sexually active students using contraceptives, according to the Prospector survey, Pomian and Rockwell not only deem providing students with contraceptives at school a good idea — they deem it a necessary one. Prospect parent *Becky Wheeler is also a supporter of having the school provide contraceptives because as a pro-life person, she does not want stories similar to Rockwell’s to become a norm.

“I’m pro-life, and I mean that,” Wheeler said. “Because of my beliefs, I give my own children contraceptives. I don’t want them going around and having sex, but if they do, I don’t want an unwanted pregnancy on my family’s hands. Parents need to protect their kids, and encouraging safe, protected sex is the way to do that.”

According to District 214 Superintendent David Schuler, systems like the one being suggested by Pomian, Rockwell and Wheeler are typically referred to as [condom availability programs](#) (CAPs) or [IUD availability programs](#) and are run through a health clinic that is affiliated with the school. If one of these programs were to ever be implemented at a D214 school, these services would be available through the nurse’s office.

Furthermore, Schuler talks about how a program such as this would require the school nurse to give the students asking for contraceptives a more in-depth abstinence education and STI education than they receive in their Health Education course as of now. In order to ensure that this education was given, the school nurse would have to track which students ask for contraceptives and it could not be an “off the books” thing, according to Schuler.

Moreover, Schuler says that programs such as these could become problematic because the school would need to find a secure, confidential location to track students which could lead students to feel that their privacy is being violated. As Schuler puts it, the chances of a student being comfortable with asking their school nurse for contraceptives and then having to sit through abstinence education are slim and is a major reason as to why a program like this has never been

ARE YOU COMFORTABLE ASKING YOUR PARENTS FOR CONTRACEPTIVES?

28.6%

71.4%

■ = YES
■ = NO

**information courtesy of a Prospector survey of 255 students*

SHOULD PROSPECT PROVIDE CONTRACEPTIVES TO STUDENTS?

82.1%

17.9%

instituted.

In fact, this idea is not a new one, and Schuler states that the district did vet a possibility of these programs about eight years ago, but at the time the district decided against its implementation. While this issue never directly went to a board meeting vote, Schuler does say that the conversation was a thorough and well-researched one.

“There was a huge concern [eight years ago] that we were starting to turn the nurse’s office into more of a health clinic versus providing resources for students who are in our buildings based on their need,” Schuler said. “Then the question went, ‘Well if you start to open that door, then what comes next from a health clinic perspective?’”

After this, the district decided that the resources provided through outside free clinics were adequate, and the talks of a CAP being instituted within D214 ended. Wheeler says that while this may have been true eight years ago, she thinks that the district should come back to this issue and consider the possibility of the schools providing contraceptives.

In fact, Wheeler takes it even further than schools and to the law in general and firmly believes that teenagers should start making decisions for themselves; she finds that parental consent and notification barriers to abortion and contraceptive access are detrimental to teenage well-being. She says this because she finds that teens will be scared off if they need to confront their parents about this extremely personal part of their lives.

With Rockwell’s story and the fact that 77.3% of Prospect students said they are unwilling to speak with their parents about

being sexually active, Wheeler finds that with adequate education on the topic, they need to have “full range over the personal decisions that they make in regards to sexual activity.” Wheeler likes to mention that the age of consent in the state of Illinois is 17 years old, so the fact that “juniors can say yes to sex but struggle to get protection” is in her mind backwards thinking.

“Parental notification is a problem for very close families,” Illinois Rep. Jan Schakowsky, the Arlington Heights and Mount Prospect representative, said in an interview with The Prospector. “The young person would not want to disappoint their parents, get into a situation of conflict or even be thrown out of the house. Because of this, I don’t think that minors should have really difficult barriers to cross in order to have an abortion or contraceptive access.”

At the end of the day, Rockwell, Pomian and Wheeler all agree that abortion is not something that should be common and that it should be up to the government to make contraceptives easier for teenage access, in terms of both price and physical access, everywhere. Rockwell likes to also emphasize that she now gets her birth control from a website called [Nurx](#) and wishes that more female students were aware of this service.

Nurx is a website that allows people to get a birth control prescription online and have it sent to their house without any parental notification or consent.

Although she is fortunate enough to use this website, Rockwell is aware that those who do not have the monetary means to afford birth control “deserve access to the same products” and finds that this financial inequality can be solved by having public schools provide the products.

On the other hand, Welsh still argues that students should not be having sex at such a young age and that “parents and teachers alike should be pushing abstinence over birth control.” Welsh does acknowledge the immense data that shows that increased contraceptive access does lead to lower rates of unwanted pregnancies, but his worry is not pregnancy, but rather young teenagers having sex at a time where “they should be focused on their education and the activities they’re in.”

After her experience with the abortion, Rockwell “definitely understands” what Welsh is arguing and feels that many students should in fact listen to what he says about abstinence and focusing on school. She also likes to add on to Welsh’s words by saying that while birth control is not one hundred percent effective, [data shows](#) that it is immensely helpful towards lowering pregnancy rates. However, Rockwell does not discourage students from making their own personal decisions in regards to their sexual lives — as long as they do it in a safe way, so a story like hers does not have a sequel.

“The abortion destroyed me emotionally,” Rockwell said. “It took months for me to be able to look in the mirror and be proud of the person I saw ... With the help of [my friend], I understood that my story is one that ... has a simple solution. I wanted birth control, but I couldn’t get it.”

77.3%

OF STUDENTS SAY THEY ARE NOT COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING SEXUAL ACTIVITY WITH THEIR PARENTS



7 IN 10 FEMALE STUDENTS DO NOT KNOW WHERE TO GET CONTRACEPTIVES

66.7%

OF STUDENTS HAVE NOT HAD “THE TALK” WITH THEIR PARENTS