My name is Jocelyn Ramirez, and this past summer I had the honor to be a RRASC intern with the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health (ICAH). ICAH is located in my hometown, Chicago, IL. There were some challenges during my entirety of this internship, but overall this had to be the best internship that I had the privilege of working and receiving.

At ICAH, my supervisor was Nataly, who at the time was the Organizing Manger (she was later given the new title of Assistant Director). ICAH’s office was located a few blocks away from Millennium Park. However, they needed to find a new space. I spent my first two weeks at the office while the other eight weeks I did my work from home. I had a couple of projects including working on the Stop PNA campaign (Stop Parental Notice of Abortion Act).

My main duty on the StopPNA campaign was to identify supporters and recruit any organizations that would want to take any action in repealing PNA. This was hard to achieve as many organizations ignored my inquiries. However, I am happy that I was able to communicate with many organizations and at least inform them as to why PNA is such an important issue. I had to draft a letter that the organizations would sign on to show support. At the end of my internship, I was able to start a relationship with five organizations including the Illinois Safe School Alliance, American Association of University Women-Chicago Chapter, Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation, and the Center for Interdisciplinary and Innovation in Sexual and Reproductive Health. For anyone who ends up interning with ICAH, it is important that we continue to foster relationships with these groups! This assignment did not have a deadline per se, so I continued outreach throughout the entirety of my internship.
During my first week of my internship, I was able to join a meeting with the Director of the Reproductive Rights Project in conjunction with the ACLU of Illinois. She gave us a detailed and great overview on the history of reproductive rights in Illinois as she litigated in many cases related to access. Throughout that meeting, I learned just how hard it would be to repeal PNA however, it shows just how important it is to the work that we are doing and to continue to educate why PNA is harmful. Therefore, I did not have these high expectations that we were going to do something soon regarding working with the legislature. Although, it would have been easier if ICAH had something more substantial to say about what actions groups can take next in Illinois. For example, ICAH’s StopPNA website is pretty outdated, so I had to make recommendations for the website as a small side project. It is important for any intern to be innovative and think of ways to be helpful without being asked. So I also took on creating a new petition that folks or community groups could sign on. One thing I wished occurred in my internship was having meetings with other organizations to think of ways of collaborating with one another.

Throughout the first few weeks of my internship, I also did recruitment for ICAH’s CHAT Network (Change, Heal, Act, Together). This program is targeted towards young people ages 14-24 in the Chicago area, so they can work on their advocacy and organizing skills and work on issues related to reproductive justice. It was sometimes tedious work to call and email organizations, but it also allowed me to get familiar with the many organizations in Chicago that serve youth. I once did outreach at the Dyke March in Chicago which was lots of fun! There are so many organizations that serve youth; I hope that by reaching out to them, ICAH was able to create a larger network. We had to extend the application once because we were not getting as many applicants as we wanted to, but eventually we did!
At some point in early July, ICAH went remote. The transition was definitely hard for all of us. We met up biweekly to catch up and share any updates within the organization. I believe it was the first meeting where there was a lot of attention in the news about another police shooting. For some reason this time around, I was so emotionally drained. The discourse on racial issues was something that I wanted to ignore for a while, but it was so hard to stay away when there are so ignorant people. It really made me questions the role of allyship and the role of white people in racial discourse. I am happy though that I was able to bring up these feelings with my staff and that they allowed a space for us to convene and reflect. This was a great example of how ICAH and people in the reproductive justice movement try to integrate self-care into their work.

Apart from these few projects, I helped Nataly with some administrative tasks as well, such as transcribing materials and helping with writing drafts. The part where I felt like I learned the most was readings the responses from young pregnant and parenting youth and their experiences of discrimination in school. Before this internship, I held a lot of negative views on young pregnant and parenting people. Learning what ICAH does to advocate on behalf of young pregnant and parenting students made me want to be a better ally to these young folks. I learned that we as a society cannot afford to punish or shame young folks for their pregnancy or parenting status. I never learned what rights young pregnant and parenting students had in school. This internship really broaden my definition of what Title IX covers and made me feel like I can be a better educator on the rights that students have. One of the final projects that I had for my internship was helping revise and edit a Title IX model policy that ICAH was going to present to Chicago Public Schools. This was definitely one of the exciting projects to be able to work on. In addition to the model policy, I also worked on a list of resources for young pregnant
and parenting students in the state of Illinois. This was actually a harder task than I thought it would be however, the criteria we wanted was that the resources were state-funded and statewide. I was unable to create the comprehensive list that I wanted before my internship was over, but I think this is a good example of how sometimes you may not finish the projects that you want to complete over the course of your internship. I was also unable to finish conducting interviews and collecting testimonials from young pregnant and parenting students. ICAH planned to use these testimonials in order to promote the Title IX model policy they were going to introduce. However, I did help create a template for interview questions and was able to use a testimonial from my sister to be included in the project and making sure that the questions were appropriate. Overall, this project was good experience for my drafting and revising skills.

The other small project that I had was drafting flashcards that ICAH develops to help facilitate interpersonal communication. ICAH had previously developed flashcards for health care professionals and school staff to use. In each of these flashcards, there were scenarios that a student or patient may have or questions they may ask and responses that a good adult ally would give. The flashcards that ICAH was working on were for family communication. I helped come up with scenarios and responses that parents or other family members could give. This was a fun project to work on and one that I felt was necessary. It was a good opportunity to share some things I find parents do not talk about or respond to in terms of health communication with their children. Overall, it was a another chance to work on my writing skills.

Apart from these projects, I mentioned that I also did administrative tasks. One thing I did throughout the summer was figuring out where ICAH should host one of their annual events called Strike a Convo. It is a day where ICAH invites folks from their network and the public to join in on bowling and learn about what Parental Notification of Abortion means for young folks
in Illinois. It is supposed to be a way to educate folks in a fun setting. I also attended online or in-person workshops on behalf of ICAH. One of the workshops I attended was a forum on Infant Mortality rates in Illinois and discussing the social determinants of health. It was a great setting as it was hosted by UIC School of Public Health and included many folks in the health care professions. I definitely was the youngest person there, but it was a good experience for me to talk and connect with health care professionals. As I am a current senior now, I am thinking about graduate school. I think before this internship, I wanted to work as a community organizer. There are definitely parts of me where I want to speak directly with folks and get them excited about an issue. However, I also think this work can get a bit tedious for me and feel boring at times. The biggest takeaway from this internship was to continue my education. My first plan was to graduate and then find a job at a non-profit or interest group. Now I am hoping to apply to schools for Social Work. Throughout the many internships I have held, I realized that I can get bored easily. I like how social work has many different options for me and what capacity I can work in. Most of the people in ICAH have their Masters in Social Work, including my supervisor Nataly and the executive director Tiffany. Going into social work sounds far from what I intended to do, but I am happy to say that I will continue to go to school and receive my Masters. Who would have thought?! I am currently a political science major, and I think my work experience prepared me more for the internship than my current studies. However, the majority of my classes are social science classes where I had the opportunity to talk about race, gender, sexuality, and other subjects. So, I think taking a sociology class or gender and women studies class would really help! I am also a communications minor, so a communication class can definitely help with communication outreach and campaign building.
Even though the majority of the internship was remote, I feel like my supervisor Nataly did a good job of making sure I was busy and that I had work I wanted to do. She would always ask me if I was doing well and if I need a bigger or smaller workload. It was tricky at the end of my internship because Nataly went into labor a bit sooner than expected. I was a bit out of touch with what was going on and being remote made the situation harder. I am happy to say that Nataly gave birth to healthy baby named Diego! Tiffany, our executive director oversaw my work in my last week. Although she did not supervise me for the majority of my internship, she was thankful for the help I provided to Nataly, and encouraged me to reach out to the ICAH staff for any help on graduate school applications or if I wanted to know about job openings within their networks. It would have been great if they had occasional get-togethers with the staff and interns. I feel like I do not know them outside of their work. It was also hard because I was the only intern in Chicago, and many of the RRASC interns were able to meet up occasionally in their respective host cities.

There was a lot I learn about myself; I have set new goals and learned what I really want to do with my career. I feel like I know what it means to be an adult ally to young folks. Through CLPP, I also learned about Advocates for Youth, another sexual health group and I am currently on their campus organizing team. It is safe to say that my work in the reproductive justice movement is not over. In terms of my social work degree, I hope to specialize in health and public policy. I definitely recommended ICAH because they are part of a larger family working for reproductive justice, and I am so grateful to be part of the CLPP and ICAH family.