May 3, 2013

The Honorable Tom Udall
The Honorable Jared Polis
United States Senate U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Udall and Representative Polis:

The undersigned organizations, which share a strong interest in and commitment to equity in education, the college or career readiness of youth, and the health and well-being of children and families, offer our wholehearted support for the Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act. Your legislation will help states and local school districts across the nation to establish and fund policies and practices that are supportive of pregnant and parenting youth, so they can stay in school and graduate ready for college or careers.

Teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined by 42 percent and 49 percent respectively since the early 1990s and are now at record low levels. There has been universal progress in all states and among all ethnic and racial groups. However, it is still the case that nearly 3 in 10 girls in the U.S. become pregnant at least once by age 20 and the figure is even higher among Latinas (44 percent) and African Americans (48 percent). There are geographic variations as well—in general Southern/Southwest states have higher teen pregnancy and birth rates, and in rural counties the teen birth rate is nearly one-third higher compared to the rest of the country, regardless of age or race/ethnicity. Despite the dramatic progress, the United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the developed world—750,000 teen pregnancies each year. Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities significantly increase a student’s risk of dropping out of school: only about half (51 percent) of women who gave birth while a teen have a high school diploma compared to 89 percent of women who did not have a teen birth. In a nationwide survey of dropout youth, 33 percent of female dropouts and almost 20 percent of male dropouts said that becoming a parent was a major factor in their decision to leave school.

These alarming statistics stem from the many barriers that pregnant and parenting teens face in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school, such as: discrimination by their schools in violation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; the failure of states, school districts, and schools to excuse students for pregnancy- and childbirth-related absences or to assist them in maintaining academic progress; the challenge of juggling schoolwork with parenting responsibilities; and the lack of access to affordable, quality child care, transportation, and other critical services.

The dropout crisis experienced by this group of students has severe short- and long-term consequences for the economic success and well-being of their families and communities, as well as our nation. Female dropouts are especially likely to be unemployed, to earn
low wages if they do get jobs, and – as a result – to have to rely on public support programs. Ensuring the success of pregnant and parenting students is critical, not only for them but also for their children, who will be more likely to eventually drop out if their parents have done so. Accordingly, providing pregnant and parenting students with the supports they need to stay in school is an essential component of any serious effort to reduce family poverty and will help to ensure that more infants and toddlers have strong early childhood experiences.

And with the proper resources, this can be done. A few school districts are undertaking effective efforts to engage and re-engage pregnant and parenting students by implementing voluntary programs that provide academic and support services, which result in students’ academic success. Providing supports for pregnant and parenting students can go a long way toward improving high school graduation rates, especially because pregnant and parenting students often are highly motivated. In the same nationwide survey of dropout youth referenced above, those who left school to care for a family member or because they became a parent were more likely than any other group of dropouts to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.

The Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act will authorize the Secretary of Education to establish a formula grant program to State educational agencies, with competitive subgrants from States to local educational agencies (LEAs) to promote the educational success of pregnant and parenting students. States can use these funds for policy development and training and technical assistance to LEAs. LEAs can use their funds for policy development, training, strategic partnerships with public agencies and service providers, and direct services to pregnant and parenting students, such as academic counseling, case management, child care and transportation assistance, health and social service referrals, and parenting, life skills, and healthy relationships education. The Secretary of Education will collect and report data annually on pregnant and parenting students, including their graduation rates, and will conduct a rigorous evaluation of the programs funded by the Act.

Senator Udall and Representative Polis, thank you for your leadership in working to improve the educational outcomes and financial security of pregnant and parenting students – and, by extension, their children. We encourage other Members of Congress to join in this important effort.

We look forward to the enactment of the provisions of the Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act, and further urge Congress to include the bill’s provisions as part of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It is critical that Congress take steps in the ESEA reauthorization to provide support for this particularly at-risk group of students.

Signed,
National Organizations

9to5
ACCEPT
Advocates for Youth
African American Ministers in Action
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Medical Student Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American Sexual Health Association
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals
Break the Cycle
Catholics for Choice
CLASP (Center for Law and Social Policy)
Children's Advocacy Institute
Community Action Partnership
Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet
Dream Enterprises Health Education Services
Equal Rights Advocates
Faith for Change
Feminist Majority Foundation
First Focus Campaign for Children
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
Global Justice Institute
Healthy Teen Network
Human Rights Project for Girls
League of United Latin American Citizens
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Metropolitan Community Churches
Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Ms. Foundation for Women
NAACP
NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund Inc.
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Crittenton Foundation
National Education Association
National Indian Education Association
National Network for Youth
National Organization for Women
National Urban League
National Women's Conference Committee
National Women’s Law Center
Our Bodies Ourselves
People For the American Way
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
Public Justice Center
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Religious Institute
RESULTS
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
School Social Work Association of America
Sexuality Education and Information Council of the United States
Sisters of Charity Nazareth Central Leadership
Smart Stop Learning Center
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Teen Success
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Unitarian Universalist Association
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's Law Project
Women's Sports Foundation
World Knowledge Bank
YWCA USA
Youth Activism Project

State and Local Organizations

Arizona Collaborative for Adolescent Health
California Center for Rural Policy
California WIC Association
Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth (CA)
National Council of Jewish Women-California
TeenNow California
Brighter Beginnings (Oakland, CA)
Clinica Sierra Vista (Bakersfield, CA)
Dependency Legal Group of San Diego (CA)
Great Beginnings for Black Babies (Inglewood, CA)
Hillsides (Los Angeles, CA)
Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco (CA)
Los Angeles Community Legal Center and Educational (CA)
New Voices Are Rising Project (Oakland, CA)
Restorative Schools Vision Project (Sacramento, CA)
Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment (Oakland, CA)
San Francisco Court Appointed Special Advocates Program (CA)
Watts/Century Latino Organization (Los Angeles, CA)
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights
Colorado Youth Matter
Florence Crittenton Services of Colorado
Advocacy Denver (CO)
Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (CT)
Mansfield Housing Authority (CT)
DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
RESULTS DC
Florida Association for Infant Mental Health
Center for Independent Living of South Florida, Inc.
Healthy Teens Coalition of Manatee County (Manatee County, FL)
Georgia Women for a Change
Social Justice Guild of the First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta (GA)
Hawaii Youth Services Network
Centro de Comunidad y Justicia (Boise, ID)
Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health
Alternatives (Chicago, IL)
Arab American Family Services (Bridgeview, IL)
Civitas ChildLaw Center, Loyola University Chicago School of Law (IL)
Chicago Child Care Society (IL)
Marillac House (Chicago, IL)
Women Employed (Chicago, IL)
Child and Family Policy Center (IA)
EyesOpenIowa
Crisis Center & Women's Shelter (Ottumwa, IA)
Southwest Iowa Latino Resource Center
GWIA (God's Will In Action) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
WISDOM (Well-Instructed Students Devoted to Our Messiah) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
KAPCHS (Kingsway Academy Private Christian High School) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
CSH (Career Search Hotline) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
CPIBT (Committee to Preserve Independence Bus Transit) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
CACTF (Citizens Alternative Crime Task Force) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
SSL (South Sea Linden) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
PAL (Platform for Affordable Livability) (Kansas City area, KS and MO)
Kentucky Youth Advocates
Louisiana Housing Alliance
Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore (MD)
PeterCares House (Greenbelt, MD)
Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy
Michigan’s Children
Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health
Work Services Inc (Jackson, MI)
Minnesota AIDS Project
Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center
Litchfield Public Schools #465 Early Childhood Programs (MN)
Nollie Jenkins Family Life Center, Inc. (Lexington, MS)
Center for People in Need (Lincoln, NE)
Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Justice Team (NE)
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
Education Law Center (NJ)
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (NJ)
New Mexico Alliance for School Based Health Care
New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition
New Mexico Voices for Children
Southwest Women’s Law Center (NM)
Young Women United (NM)
Honor Our Pueblo Existence (H.O.P.E.) (Espanola, NM)
Brooklyn Young Mothers Collective (NY)
Inwood House (New York, NY)
NMPP/Community Health Worker Program (New York, NY)
Student Advocacy (Westchester and Putnam Counties, NY)
Action for Children North Carolina
Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina
YWCA Greensboro (NC)
Ohio Chapter of the National Organization for Women
Ohio NOW and Education and Legal Fund
Democratic Socialists of Central Ohio
Northeast Ohio Legal Services
AFT-Oklahoma
SMART (Single Mother Academic Resource Team) (OK)
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Allegheny Valley Association of Churches (Natrona Heights, PA)
Division of Adolescent Medicine, Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC (PA)
International Institute for Restorative Practices (Bethlehem, PA)
Juvenile Law Center (Philadelphia, PA)
Maternity Care Coalition (Philadelphia, PA)
SEIU Local 668 (Harrisburg, PA)
Woonsocket Head Start Child Development Association (RI)
South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Malcolm X Center for Self Determination (Greenville, SC)
Healthy and Free Tennessee
CHOICES (Memphis, TN)
Memphis Teen Vision (TN)
Texans Care for Children
Texas Association Concerned with School-Age Parenthood
Education Equals Making Community Connections (Plantersville, TX)
North Dallas Chapter of National Organization for Women (Plano/Dallas, TX)
Voices for Vermont's Children
Virginia Organizing
Lewis County Family Resource Network (WV)