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Pregnant teens cost state \$109M

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Boston Herald Health & Medical Reporter

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Some groups are calling on the state to put more money into teen pregnancy prevention and health education after a report showed that Massachusetts teen moms and their kids cost the state \$109 million a year in social services.

Massachusetts has one of the country's lowest teen birth rates, but it's still too high, said Patricia Quinn, public policy director at the Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy. In 2004, 4,559 women ages 15 to 19 had children, for a rate of 22.2 births per 1,000 female teens. The national rate is 31 births per 1,000 teens.

But Quinn said even though the state's teen birth rate has dropped 40 percent since 1991, Massachusetts still hasn't realized the value of prevention, based on how much it's costing taxpayers.

"That's money that could be saved if we were doing a better job in Massachusetts of really funding teen pregnancy efforts," she said.

Teen pregnancies in 2004 in Vermont cost \$12 million, the smallest amount. Texas topped the charts with \$1 billion in costs, according to a report released yesterday by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Nationally, teen childbearing cost the government \$9.1 billion in 2004.

State comparisons are difficult because population and teen birth rates vary, the authors noted. The report looked at the cost of public welfare, incarceration of children of teen parents, health care and lost tax revenue. Most of the costs are associated with the child, not the mother, according to the report.

Angus McQuilken, public affairs director for Planned Parenthood in Massachusetts, said more money needs to be put into education.

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