



STATES REACT TO THE HIGH COSTS OF TEEN PREGNANCIES

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Shocking estimates of the costs of teen pregnancy are catching the eye of some state legislators. Even though the rate of teen pregnancy in the United States has declined by one-third since the early 1990s, teen childbearing still costs the public sector at least \$9.1 billion annually, according to a [report](#) released late last year by the non-partisan [National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy](#).

Not surprisingly, the most populous states had the highest rates of teen births. Among those states, **Texas** paid the most: \$1.2 billion in 2004. Texas Senator Leticia Van de Putte said she was not surprised that Texas has the highest public cost for teen pregnancy. "We have cut family planning money at the local level and cut services to 17,000 women," she commented. "The research tracks what is going on in the state."

States have been working to prevent teen pregnancies in part because doing so is one of the most effective ways to improve child well-being and reduce persistent child poverty. Despite hitting the lowest level in 30 years, teen pregnancy rates are still high: one in three girls get pregnant at least once before they reach age 20, resulting in almost 750,000 teen pregnancies a year, according to the Campaign.

In Texas, Senator Van de Putte and Senator Florence Shapiro have introduced [SB156](#), the "Nurse Family Partnership Grant Program." The bill would establish a competitive grant program that would put nurses into 11 communities with the goal of preventing subsequent pregnancies to teen mothers and improving the health and development of the children of teen mothers. The bill requires that the program be based on the [model](#) developed by the Nurse-Family Partnership Service Office, an evidence-based nurse home visitation program developed by a nonprofit based in Denver, **Colorado**.

Over the past several years, Colorado, **Florida** and **Illinois** have all passed legislation related to teen pregnancy prevention. In 2006, the Colorado Legislature made permanent a pilot project by passing [HB 1351](#). This community-based program was established in 1995 to provide support to Medicaid-eligible at-risk teens and teen parents, including intensive individual or group counseling, and vocational and educational guidance and health services.

Bill sponsor Colorado Representative Ray Rose said that the program has reduced the rate of subsequent pregnancies for teen moms and cut Medicaid costs. "The rate of subsequent pregnancies for moms in the program is 1 percent compared to over 20 percent for the rest of the state," she noted. "This program is a tremendous community partnership that works with the local charter school and the hospital."

In 2005, Florida enacted [SB 1650](#), which authorized inclusion of teen pregnancy prevention in a plan to reduce the need for public assistance. This plan includes implementing the model program Project ENABL (Education Now and Babies Later), as well as providing assistance to teen parents for educational or employment programs or both.

In 2003, the Illinois Legislature passed [HB 1630](#), which called for creation of a program to conduct research, education and prevention activities for at-risk Hispanic/Latino teenagers.

The Campaign's report measures the costs that could be averted if today's teen mothers delayed their first birth to their early 20s. Researchers took into account such factors as the number of teen births in each state; the lower taxes the mother, her partner and their children pay due to lower incomes; the costs of public assistance and the increased likelihood that sons born to teen moms will be incarcerated.

The Campaign suggests that legislators set a specific goal for reducing teen pregnancy, share information related to costs with other policymakers, help parents by sharing information with them, and support proven teen pregnancy interventions and youth programs. For more policy suggestions, see <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/policy/>.

NCSL members may access the "[Teen Pregnancy Legisbrief](#)."

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