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Public Statements

News from...



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The Fight to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

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During the last decade, one of our nation's most positive social trends has been the decline in teen pregnancy. According to The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Arkansas has seen a 24 percent drop in teen pregnancies since 1990, the result of enhanced education programs and improved outreach to at-risk teens. In spite of this positive trend, the rate of teen pregnancy in our state is still far too high. In fact, as a nation, the United States has the highest rates of any developed country in the world. In Arkansas alone, between 1991 and 2004, there were over 91,800 births to teen mothers costing taxpayers nearly \$2 billion..

To bring greater awareness to this issue, the National Campaign has designated Wednesday, May 2, 2007, as the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Throughout the nation, teens are encouraged to participate in an online quiz to learn about the dangers of too-early pregnancy and parenthood. This program is critically important because statistics prove that teen pregnancies can lead to a host of problems for young mothers, fathers, and their children, such as dropping out of school, living in poverty, and endangering the welfare of a child.

According to reports provided by the National Campaign, teen pregnancy is the leading cause of school drop out among teenage girls. In fact, less than half of the mothers who have a child before they turn 18 ever graduate from high school. A child born to a teen mother is also more likely to grow up in poverty, and almost half of all teen mothers and over three-fourths of unmarried teen mothers begin receiving welfare within five years of the birth of their first child. Lastly, children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely, and the children of teen parents are two times more likely to suffer abuse and neglect than they would have if their mothers had delayed childbearing.

The result of these early births create a burden for state and local governments. In Arkansas, teen childbearing still cost Arkansas taxpayers at least \$112 million in 2004, and 50 percent of those costs were borne by state and local government. Some of that \$112 million included \$22 million for public health care, \$10 million for child welfare, \$14 million for incarceration, and \$41 million in lost tax revenue due to decreased earnings over the children's career.

Being a parent is one of life's greatest blessings, but being mature enough to be a good and thoughtful parent is essential. As a public servant and as a mother, I've taken a special interest in supporting programs, like the National Day to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, to curtail teen pregnancy. Teen pregnancy is at its lowest rate in the last 30 years, and increased awareness and education will only continue to bring those numbers down.

Parents, teachers, churches, and community organizations should take advantage of resources to educate teens about the consequences of their actions. But we must also commit ourselves to spending the necessary quality time with our children to help them navigate life's difficult choices. Adolescence should be a time for learning and growing - not parenthood. Let's work together to make teen pregnancy a thing of the past.

To participate in the National Day Quiz, visit www.teenpregnancy.org on May 2nd and throughout the month of May.

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