



January 19, 2011

Ms. Sarah Potter
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW – Room 404E
Washington, DC 20201

Re: Comments to inform the development of a strategic plan for federal youth policy

To Whom It May Concern:

In response to the solicitation from the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs for comments to inform the development of a strategic plan for federal youth policy, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy respectfully submits the comments for your consideration. Please know we are happy to assist in any way we can as you make progress in this very important policy area.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a research-based, bipartisan and non-profit group that was founded in 1996. Our mission is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families, and in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. Our specific strategy is to prevent teen and unplanned pregnancy, especially among single, young adults. We support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors. If we are successful, child and family well-being will improve; there will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, fewer abortions, and a stronger nation.

Teen pregnancy is closely linked to a host of health, economic, and social issues, such as poverty, school completion, and child welfare. There are also substantial public costs associated with adolescent childbearing. Teen childbearing in the United States costs taxpayers (federal, state, and local) at least \$9.1 billion annually.¹ A child's chance of growing up in poverty is nine times greater if the mother gave birth as a teen, if the parents were unmarried when the child was born, and if the mother did not receive a high school diploma than if none of these circumstances are present.²

We support the Working Group's focus on youth through several stages of development, and including youth up to age 24. Older teens (ages 18–19) account for the vast majority of teen pregnancies and births. Yet few efforts have addressed preventing teen pregnancy among this age group.³ Like teen pregnancy, unplanned pregnancy among young adults is at the root of a number of important public health and social challenges. For example, even when taking into account various social and economic factors, women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy are

less likely to obtain prenatal care, and their babies are at increased risk of both low birthweight and of being born prematurely, as well as less likely to be breast fed. Half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned.⁴ That is, of the 6.4 million pregnancies each year, roughly three million are unplanned. More than three-quarters of all unplanned pregnancies occur to women younger than age 30, and 7 in 10 pregnancies among unmarried women in their 20s are reported by women themselves to be unplanned.⁵ Children raised in single-parent families face more challenges in a variety of areas than do children raised in two-parent, low-conflict married families. For example, when compared to similar children who grow up with two parents, children in one-parent families are more likely to be poor, drop out of high school, have lower grade-point averages, lower college aspirations, and poorer school attendance records. As adults, they also have higher rates of divorce. Such data suggest that reducing unplanned pregnancy will increase the proportion of children born into circumstances that better support their growth and development.

What can be done to reduce unplanned pregnancy among teens and young adults? There are several evidence-based programs that have been shown to be effective not only in preventing teen pregnancy, but also at addressing a host of other issues, including those laid out in the Working Group's framework. For example, the Teen Outreach Program, a curriculum-based program with a service learning component, has been found to decrease teen pregnancy and increase high school graduation. Preliminary evidence suggests that the Children's Aid Society - Carrera Program, another effective teen pregnancy prevention program that provides youth with information on such topics as financial literacy and academic success, can lead to increased high school graduation and college enrollment among participants. More information about these evidence-based programs and others is available [here](#).

We recognize that there are many barriers at the federal, state, and local levels to collaborating to improve prospect for youth. We also note that there are ways these can be overcome and models for collaboration exist in the field of teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention. The Interagency Working Group will help to overcome some of these silos at the federal level. The recently funded community-wide teen pregnancy prevention initiative provided an example of government and communities collaborating at the federal, state, and local levels. This initiative, funded by the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH), required applicants to identify community partners, including partners focused on youth development, in their proposal. Additionally, OAH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Administration on Children, Youth and Families have all coordinated on teen pregnancy prevention efforts. In some cases this coordination is reflected in the developing joint funding announcements. Overall, the offices are working together in order to ensure that funding streams are complementary, and not duplicative. For more information on teen pregnancy prevention funding and how these programs can accomplish several goals, please read *The National Campaign's Policy Brief: Opportunities for States to Address Teen Pregnancy Through New Federal Funding Streams* which is available [here](#).

Federal agencies can assist in this coordination by allowing waivers that give states the ability to blend funding streams and promote more flexibility in eligibility criteria. The federal government can also help ensure efficiency by focusing on programs that help to achieve multiple outcomes, rather than just multiple programs that achieve only one outcome. By

supporting programs proven to reduce teen and unplanned pregnancy, the Working Group can make progress to achieving many of its overarching goals.

It is also important to engage youth in these efforts. Toward that end, the Working Group could look to organizations that have used youth in their programs. The Working Group could also look to new media and social networks to reach out to youth and solicit input and feedback. A good example of this sort of effort is The National Campaign's Stay Joven PSA Program. Latino teens have reported to us that they don't see themselves in the media they watch. In addition, these teens have indicated that the teen pregnancy prevention messages in the media failed to resonate with them. To address these concerns, we provided Latino teens from all over the country with video cameras and created the Stay Joven digital media project in order to provide Latino youth an opportunity to film, record, and share their views on being Latinos today and what they want for the future. To view these PSAs by Latino teens for Latino teens, click [here](#).

Teen and unplanned pregnancy affects many aspects of youth development, health and well-being, as well as the well-being of the next generation. As such, it is critical for an effective Strategic Plan for Federal Youth Policy to address teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit comments. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Lisa Shuger, Director of Public Policy at 202-478-8576 or lishuger@thenc.org.

Sincerely,



Sarah S. Brown
CEO

¹ Hoffman, S. (2006). *By the Numbers: The Public Costs of Teen Childbearing* Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/costs/pdf/report/BTN_National_Report.pdf

² *Policy Brief: The Link Between Reducing Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and Poverty*. (March, 2010) Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_Policy_Brief_Link_Reducing_TUP_Poverty%20.pdf

³ Suellentrop, K. (2010). *The Odyssey Years: Preventing Teen Pregnancy Among Older Teens*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/odyssey_years.pdf

⁴ National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. (2007) *Unplanned Pregnancy Among 20-Somethings: The Full Story*. Washington, DC. <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/briefly-unplanned-pregnancy-among-20somethings-the-full-story.pdf>

⁵ *Policy Brief: The Link Between Reducing Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and Poverty*. (March 2010) Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/Briefly_Policy_Brief_Link_Reducing_TUP_Poverty%20.pdf