



August 13, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

On behalf of The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, I write to express our strong support for including “unintended and teen pregnancy prevention” as an objective and an area for interagency collaboration in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ draft Strategic Plan for 2010-2015. We commend your leadership and your commitment to reducing teen and unplanned pregnancy, which has significant health, economic, and social consequences for our nation.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy is a research-based, bi-partisan 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, few abortions, and a stronger nation.

We are most grateful for your recognition that “unintended and teen pregnancy prevention” must be part of our nation’s strategy to make substantial progress in ensuring the public health, well-being and healthy development of children and youth, as well as educational attainment and academic success. The evidence is clear that teen parents and their children are more likely to face a range of challenges in all of these domains. Making an investment in evidence-based teen pregnancy reduction strategies, targeting populations at highest risk for teen pregnancy, and increasing access to clinical services, such as Title X and community health centers, are important steps to help women, men, and families achieve their goals.

The Strategic Plan rightly identifies several issues, such as poverty and teen pregnancy, as pervasive, harmful, and costly public health problems. Infants born to teen mothers are at increased risk of being born prematurely and at a low birthweight. This puts newborns at greater risk for infant death and many serious health problems. In addition, 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

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the mother did not receive a high school diploma than if none of these circumstances are present. Approximately one-quarter of teen mothers go on welfare within three years of the child's birth.

As noted in the Strategic Plan, there is a strong link between preventing teen and unintended pregnancy and educational attainment and academic achievement. Teen pregnancy/parenthood and school dropout are closely associated. Only 40 percent of teen moms finish high school and the crisis extends to postsecondary institutions as well. Less than two percent of teen moms finish college by age 30. Thirty percent of teen girls cite pregnancy or parenthood as a key reason for dropping out of high school.

Half of all pregnancies in this country are unplanned as reported by women themselves and more than three-quarters of all unplanned pregnancies occur to women younger than age 30. More must be done to ensure access to contraception which is widely used and supported. Pregnancy prevention is also cost-effective—contraceptive use saves nearly \$19 billion in direct medical costs each year.

We are also pleased that you have identified “unintended and teen pregnancy prevention” as an area for interagency collaboration. It is critical for agencies that administer programs addressing teen and unplanned pregnancy prevention to coordinate their activities.

We applaud your efforts and stand ready to assist your department as you move forward on the Strategic Plan for 2010-2015. Should you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me (ssbrown@thenc.org or 202.478.8578) or Lisa Shuger, Director of Public Policy (lsugher@thenc.org or 202.478.8576).

With deep respect and admiration,



Sarah S. Brown

Responsible behavior. Responsible policies.