

May 30, 2013

Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Room S 128, Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Room H 307, Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator
Dear Member of Congress

As organizations working in child welfare and devoted to improving the lives of children and families, we are acutely aware of how teen and unplanned pregnancy affects the lives of young parents and their children. We therefore write in support of investing in grants that will help expand the evidence about what works for preventing pregnancy among youth in foster care.

The President's budget proposed to provide approximately \$12 million in competitive grants to public child welfare agencies to reduce pregnancy among youth in foster care using a range of approaches. This proposal recognizes two important realities: 1) teen pregnancy has important consequences and costs for the child welfare system and 2) youth in foster care face unique circumstances and we do not yet know as much as we need to about how to help these young people delay early pregnancy and childbearing. Youth in foster care are often exposed to factors that put them at higher risk of getting pregnant at a young age. They are more likely to have sex at a young age and to experience forced sex, an unintended or non-marital birth, and a sexually transmitted infection (STI). For example, a teen girl in foster care is 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant by the age of 19 than her peers not in foster care and by age 21, nearly half of young men in foster care reported getting a girl pregnant compared to 19 percent of their peers that had never been in the foster care system. In addition to the human consequences, this has very real financial implications: teen childbearing costs the child welfare system at least \$2.8 billion annually because children born to teen mothers are more likely to end up in foster care.

Helping youth in foster care avoid early pregnancy and parenthood can improve their likelihood for a successful transition from the foster care system into adulthood, including completing education and getting stable employment. In the last few years, a number of child welfare agencies and judges have begun to address these issues. This proposal would go a long way to support, learn from, and expand these efforts. It recognizes that there are a variety of approaches that need to be tried from using or adapting existing evidence-based programs to training foster parents, caseworkers, and other service providers. Importantly, it encourages collaboration among key public and private stakeholders including the court system, juvenile justice, social services and health fields, including those in the non-profit, philanthropic, and private sectors.

The funds for this proposal would come from redirecting available formula grants for Abstinence Education that states choose not to claim, so it would not require new funding nor would it take funding from current state activities. We urge the Appropriations Committees to include this proposal in the FY 2014 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact John Sciamanna, john.sciamanna962@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely

Alliance for Children and Families
Black Administrators in Child Welfare
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Children's Defense Fund
Child Welfare League of America
First Focus
FosterClub
Healthy Teen Network
Lutheran Services in America
National Association of Social Workers
National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
National Crittenton Foundation
National Foster Parent Association
Voices for America's Children