DECLINE IN TEEN BIRTH RATES HAVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON CHILD POVERTY AND SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

FACT SHEET

A report from the U.S. Congress' Ways and Means Committee, released on April 23, 2004, suggests that the decade long decline in teen birth is significantly responsible for reducing child poverty and single parent families.

The report finds that:

- From 1991 to 2002 the teen birth rate for girls aged 15-19 has declined 30%.
- Also from 1991 to 2002, the child poverty rate fell by 23% and the percentage of children living with a single mother declined for the first time in decades.
- The decline in teen birth rates accounts for approximately 26% of the overall decline in the number of children under age six in poverty between 1995 and 2002.
- The decline in teen birth rates also accounts for an 82% decline in the number of children under age six living with a single mother between 1995 and 2002.
- If teen birth rates had remained unchanged between 1991 and 2000:
  - Nearly 1.2 million additional children would have been born to teen mothers;
  - 460,000 more children would have lived in poverty; and
  - Close to 700,000 more children would have lived in households headed by single mothers.

The recent decline in teen birthrates is encouraging; however, the United States still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and teen births among similarly developed countries.

- More than 70% of adolescent mothers will be on welfare within five years of the birth of their first child.
- In Minnesota, 55% of the MFIP budget in 2001 was spent on families begun by teens--equating to $13.3 million per month. (MN DHS, 2003)

The downward trend in teen birth rates predates welfare reform and any major federal funding of abstinence education initiatives by at least five years, and cannot be attributed to those efforts.

This recent report indicates that in order to decrease child poverty rates and single parent families, policies and programs to reduce teen pregnancy and birth rates must be implemented.

Advocate for state level policies and programs that:

- Support teen pregnancy prevention programs based on evidence of their success or their use of proven strategies.
- Ensure comprehensive sexuality education for youth that includes medically accurate and developmentally appropriate information on abstinence and contraception.
- Ensure that youth have access to confidential health care services.
- Address health disparities by supporting programs and services to communities and populations with highest rates of teen pregnancy.
- Support service learning and youth development programs, particularly those that occupy after-school hours.

Summary of report, "What If: How declines in Teen Births Have Reduced Poverty and Increased Child Well-Being," available at www.teenpregnancy.org
Full report, "Steep Decline in Teen Birth Rate Significantly Responsible for Reducing Child Poverty and Single-Parent Families Issue Brief-April 23, 2004," available at www.house.gov/waysandmeans_democrats

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