

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED BY GREATER NEW BRITAIN TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION, INC.

*Pathways/Senderos Center*

to the

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

12/9/09

Good afternoon. My name is RoseAnne Bilodeau. I am the executive director and founder of Greater New Britain Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Inc., also known as the Pathways/Senderos Center. I am here to respectfully request the continuation of full state funding for teen pregnancy prevention.

Thank you for your prior support of our successfully-evaluated teen pregnancy prevention efforts in impoverished New Britain. These investments have assured that the highest risk teens remained pregnancy free, graduated from high school and enrolled into post-secondary education. Our scientifically evaluated, results-based accountability positively impacts society immediately and in the long-term.

The U.S. has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the westernized world, having held that dubious distinction since vital statistics have been recorded. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy estimates that in 2004, teen childbearing cost Connecticut \$114 million. Premature childbearing is costly both financially and socially.

Teen pregnancy derives from and results in short and long term negative outcomes for the teen mother and her children including poverty, limited educational attainment, intergenerational family patterns of teen parenting; as well as domestic violence, particularly child sexual assault. 75% of pregnant teens had mothers who were teen moms while boys born to teen moms are 3 times more likely to be incarcerated than are their peers born to older females. Only one-third of teen mothers receive a high school diploma. The children of teens are 50% more likely to repeat a grade, require

special education services, and drop out of school. Shelters for battered women and their children see a disproportionate number of families started by teens.

This information is even more dismal when one focuses on the greatest risk population – poverty-stricken Latinas, with 53% becoming pregnant at least once before reaching the age of 20.

Pathways has demonstrated inordinate success in assisting the highest risk teens to avoid pregnancy and other risk-taking behaviors while concurrently pursuing academic achievement, leadership development and youth empowerment. We provide comprehensive, holistic, long-term services designed specifically to address the root causes of teen pregnancy. Our center is open 5 days per week, 52 weeks per year; and provides a parallel family where youngsters feel safe, welcomed and nurtured, so that learning and skill-building occur.

In sixteen years of operations, our youths' evaluated achievements include a 96% pregnancy-free rate (3 pregnancies), 100% of our participants graduate from high school and 75% of our graduates enroll into post-secondary education, mostly four year universities. Our multi-dimension prevention methodology also assists youngsters to avoid other risk taking behaviors including involvement with violence, crime, drugs and alcohol.

Our girls and boys have won our agency national recognition. Rather than hanging out on the streets, they have written books and engaged in internships with CCSU and UCONN Medical School. In fact, last June, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy hosted a conference in New Britain showcasing our successful model. Last month, a cost/benefit study conducted by Yale University's Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program was published which documents our efficacy.

I know that your charge is a difficult one. However, I wish to leave with you the understanding that should Pathways disappear from New Britain, there are 60, mostly Latino, impoverished teens, their families and friends who now have hope for their future, that will find themselves cast back into the oblivion of despair and aimlessness where sex, drugs and alcohol soothe the pain of growing up poor and oftentimes neglected.

Please don't take Pathways/Senderos away from these children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.