

Public Hearing Testimony to Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2016

Good evening. My name is Heather Mills and I am the Co-Executive Director of Greater New Britain Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Inc., also known as the Pathways/Senderos Center. I am here to request that the teen pregnancy prevention funding through the Department of Social Services be reinstated in the 2016/2017 state budget.

The state's continuous support of this funding has guaranteed that at-risk teens remain pregnancy free, graduate from high school, enroll in post-secondary education and are career ready. Teen pregnancy is still a very real problem in Connecticut, especially in our urban centers.

A recent analysis from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy shows that between 1991 and 2010 there have been 65,129 teen births in Connecticut, costing taxpayers a total of \$3.7 billion over that same period.

In 13 towns in Connecticut, where there are pockets of poverty in an otherwise wealthy state, the percentage of births to teen mothers greatly exceeded the statewide average. In New Britain, this percentage is consistently more than twice as high as the state average.

Research has shown that with strong support, educational assistance, career preparation, work opportunities, health education, counseling and medical care adolescents can be helped to delay parenthood until they are prepared emotionally and financially to support and raise a family.

Research has also identified effective program models for teen pregnancy prevention models. The statewide Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative utilizes only science-based practices and targets the neediest communities in the state and are designed to attract and retain youth most at risk for early pregnancy.

These intervention models are independently evaluated on an annual basis. Through these evaluations it has been found that even though teens participating in the Statewide Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative are at high risk for becoming teen parents, when compared with the national birth rate for young women (12.3 per 1000), the rate for teens in TPPI was dramatically lower (4.5 per 1000).

Pathways/Senderos in New Britain has utilized the evidenced based Carrera model for 23 years. 98% of all participants during that time period have avoided pregnancy, the last one being in 2006. 100% of our participants graduate from high school, 77% of graduates go on to some form of higher education and 95% of our graduates are currently working.

There has been progress made in reducing teen childbearing in Connecticut. This progress has saved taxpayers an estimated \$230 million in 2010 alone compared to the costs they would have incurred. Preventing early parenthood also reduces long-term social costs associated with teen births, including participation in public assistance programs and participation in the welfare, criminal justice and public health systems.

Prevention programs work and in the long run save the state and taxpayers money, more so than funding intervention programs which are utilized by teen parents. Without state funding our program

will have to close its doors to some of the highest risk children in the state. I hope that we can count on your support to have these funds reinstated into the state budget. Thank you.