

May 8, 2014

The Honorable Chris Murphy
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tony Cárdenas
1508 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murphy and Representative Cárdenas,

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and the National Foster Care Coalition are writing to support The At-Risk Youth Medicaid Protection Act (S. 2211 and H.R. 4390). Ensuring seamless health coverage for youth leaving juvenile justice facilities is critical to helping this vulnerable youth transition successfully into adulthood.

In recent years there has been increased attention to the high rates of pregnancy and births among youth involved in foster care and in the juvenile justice system. Young people involved in juvenile justice, like youth in foster care, have relatively high rates of early sexual activity, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancy. And, even among vulnerable youth, those arrested before age 18 were most likely to have had sex before age 16 (57% of those arrested before age 18 had had sex before age 16). In a 2009 survey of members of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, more than 90 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that “teen pregnancy is a concern to me in my professional role” (73% strongly agreed; 19% agreed). Eight in ten respondents also agreed that teen pregnancy is prevalent in their jurisdiction. Seven in 10 (69%) agreed that more than half of the cases in their court involved youth at risk of causing a pregnancy or becoming pregnant, and more than half agreed that the number of cases involving pregnant youth is considered high by the community’s standards.

It is encouraging that youth in foster care and those in the juvenile justice system are priority populations for the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) funding enacted in 2010 and many PREP grantees are now providing evidence-based programs to help young people in foster care and juvenile justice avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

While effective educational interventions are important, teens transitioning out of juvenile justice facilities also need access to effective family planning care. Coverage through Medicaid will offer these young people contraceptive counseling and a broad range of birth control methods, so they can select a method that works best for them. We believe that S. 2211 will help to ensure continuity of health coverage for these youth, including access to contraceptive services and supplies, giving them the opportunity to avoid an unplanned pregnancy at a vulnerable time in their lives.

Thank you for introducing this important measure and for your concern for this at-risk population. We look forward to working with you on this and other efforts to improve the well being of children, youth, and families.

Sincerely,

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
The National Foster Care Coalition