



SB 541 by Senator Van de Putte: Relating to the establishment of an evidence-based youth development competitive grant pilot program.

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

April 28, 2009

Good morning, Committee members. Texas Network of Youth Services is a nonprofit association of organizations that serve at-risk youth. We offer services to a variety of youth development oriented organizations around the state, and we also operate several youth development programs within our own organization. We support SB 541 because youth development programming is a crucial means of preventing teen pregnancy, although its importance often gets over-looked as attention is shifted to the sex education debate. The fact is that preventing teen pregnancy requires two strategies: (1) appropriate education so that young people know how to avoid pregnancy and (2) youth development programming that empowers young people to make the decision to avoid pregnancy in the first place. We applaud Senator Van de Putte for recognizing both of these needs and authoring this bill, SB 541, as well as coauthoring SB 515.

As you know, teen pregnancy is a huge problem in Texas; we have one of the highest teen birth rates in the U.S. Research indicates that some of these pregnancies are completely unintended and could easily be avoided by equipping young people with medically accurate information about sex and improved access to contraceptives. Research also indicates that sex education is not a panacea, however, and many other young people could benefit from additional approaches to preventing pregnancy such as service learning projects, skill building activities, mentoring opportunities, after school programs, and community resources. **In other words, youth development programming can be a very effective approach to preventing teen pregnancy, and it is considered a science-based approach.**

Despite this evidence, there is not currently a state program to support cost-effective evidence-based youth development programs shown to prevent teen pregnancy. This bill would create and fund a small pilot program that has proven effective in lowering the rate of teen pregnancy by 33 percent.

Our state's high teen pregnancy rate has severe consequences. We urge you to support Texas youth and future generations by supporting this bill.

If you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

Christine Gendron
Public Policy Coordinator
Texas Network of Youth Services
(512) 328-6860
cgendron@tnoys.org