September 20, 2010

The Honorable Jared Polis  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

Re: Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act (H.R. 5894)

Dear Representative Polis:

The undersigned organizations, which share a strong interest in and commitment to civil rights and ensuring the educational success and well-being of children, youth and families, offer our wholehearted support for the Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act (H.R. 5894). Your legislation will help states and local school districts across the nation to establish and fund policies and practices that are supportive of pregnant and parenting youth, so they can stay in school and graduate college or career ready.

For the first time in over a decade, teen pregnancy rates in the U.S. have increased. Every year in this country, there are approximately 750,000 teen pregnancies and 400,000 teen births. Overall, nearly three in ten girls get pregnant at least once before age 20, and the rates are much higher for girls of color. Pregnancy and parenting responsibilities significantly increase a student’s risk of dropping out of school: only half of teen mothers get their high school diploma by age 22, compared to 89 percent of their childless peers. In a nationwide survey of dropout youth, close to one-half of all female dropouts and one-third of male dropouts said that becoming a parent played a role in their decisions to leave school.

These alarming statistics stem from the many barriers that pregnant and parenting teens face in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school, such as: discrimination by their schools in violation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; the failure of states, school districts, and schools to excuse students for pregnancy- and childbirth-related absences or to assist them in maintaining academic progress; the challenge of juggling schoolwork with parenting responsibilities; and the lack of access to affordable, quality child care, transportation, and other critical services.

The dropout crisis experienced by this group of students has severe short- and long-term consequences for the economic success and well-being of their families and communities, as well as our nation. Female dropouts are especially likely to be unemployed, to earn low wages if they do get jobs, and – as a result – to have to rely on public support programs. Because the children of dropouts are more likely to drop out of school themselves, providing pregnant and parenting students with the supports they need to stay in school is a critical component to any serious effort to address poverty.
And with the proper resources, this can be done. At least a few school districts are undertaking effective efforts to engage and re-engage pregnant and parenting students by implementing voluntary programs that provide academic and support services, which result in students’ academic success. Providing supports for pregnant and parenting students can go a long way toward improving high school graduation rates, especially because pregnant and parenting students often are highly motivated. In the same nationwide survey of dropout youth referenced above, those who left school to care for a family member or because they became a parent were more likely than any other group of dropouts to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.

The Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act will authorize the Secretary of Education to establish a formula grant program to State educational agencies, with competitive subgrants from States to local educational agencies (LEAs) to promote the educational success of pregnant and parenting students. States can use these funds for policy development and training and technical assistance to LEAs. LEAs can use their funds for policy development, training, strategic partnerships with public agencies and service providers in the community, and direct services to pregnant and parenting students, such as academic counseling, case management, child care and transportation assistance, health and social service referrals, and parenting and life skills education. The Secretary of Education will collect and report data annually on pregnant and parenting students, including their graduation rates, and will conduct a rigorous evaluation of the programs funded by the Act. The legislation will authorize $100 million for this program for FY 2011 and such sums as may be necessary from FY 2012 through FY 2015.

Representative Polis, thank you for your leadership in working to improve the educational outcomes and financial security of pregnant and parenting students – and, by extension, their children. We encourage other Members of Congress to join in this important effort.

We look forward to the enactment of the provisions of the Pregnant and Parenting Students’ Access to Education Act, and further urge Congress to include the bill’s provisions as part of the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). It is critical that Congress take steps in the ESEA reauthorization to provide support for this particularly at-risk group of students.

Signed,

National Organizations

9to5, National Association of Working Women
Advocates for Youth
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American School Health Association
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Children’s Defense Fund
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Community Action Partnership
Equal Rights Advocates
Equity and Inclusion Campaign
End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT) USA
Every Child Matters
Feminist Majority Foundation
Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Healthy Teen Network
Ipas
Law Students for Reproductive Justice
League of United Latin American Citizens
Myra Sadker Foundation
Ms. Foundation for Women
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum
National Association of Commissions for Women
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women’s Health
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Collaboration for Youth
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
National Disability Rights Network
National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network for Youth
National Network of Abortion Funds
National Organization for Women
National WIC Association
National Women's Conference Committee
National Women's Health Network
National Women’s Law Center
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Planned Parenthood Health Systems, Inc.
Public Education Network
Rebecca Project for Human Rights
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
RESULTS: The Power to End Poverty
School Social Work Association of America
Southern Poverty Law Center
The National Crittenton Foundation
Wider Opportunities for Women
Women's Law and Policy Project, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Women’s Sports Foundation
YWCA Northeast Regional Council

State and Local Organizations

Alabama
  YWCA Central Alabama

Alaska
  Alaska Center for Public Policy

California
  9to5 Los Angeles Working Women (Los Angeles)
  9to5 Bay Area Working Women (San Jose)
  Brighter Beginnings
  California Adolescent Health Collaborative
  California Commission on the Status of Women
  California Family Health Council
  California Women’s Law Center
  Feminist Women's Health Centers of California
  LaQueena Mentoring Center, Davis Street Resource Center
  National Council of Jewish Women, California
  Restorative Schools Vision Project (Sacramento)
  Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment
  Tatia Oden French Memorial Foundation
  Therapists for Peace and Justice

Colorado
  9to5 Colorado Working Women
  Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights
  Colorado Youth Matter
  Youth Services, City of Denver, Office of Economic Development - Workforce (Denver)
  Women's Health

Connecticut
  Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.
  Connecticut Voices for Children
  Covenant to Care for Children
  National Council of Jewish Women, Connecticut
  Together We Shine
  YWCA Hartford Region
District of Columbia
  DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Florida
  Florida Fiscal Policy Project

Georgia
  Justice4Children
  9to5 Atlanta Working Women (Atlanta)

Illinois
  Black Women for Reproductive Justice
  Chicago Abortion Fund
  Hope Clinic for Women (Granite City)
  Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health
  Illinois Choice Action Team
  Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition
  Illinois Public Health Association
  McHenry County Citizens for Choice
  Mujeres Latinas en Accion
  National Council of Jewish Women, Illinois
  National Organization for Women, Chicago
  National Organization for Women, DuPage County
  National Organization for Women, Illinois
  National Organization for Women, North/Northwest Suburban Illinois
  Personal PAC
  Planned Parenthood of Illinois
  Ravenswood Community Child Care Center
  The Section of Family Planning & Contraceptive Research (University of Chicago)

Indiana
  American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana
  Child Care Consortium, Inc. (Michigan City)
  Planned Parenthood of Indiana
  Scott County Partnership

Iowa
  EyesOpenIowa
  YWCA Ames-ISU

Kansas
  Cawker City Housing Authority

Kentucky
  Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership

Louisiana
  252 Parenting Net Work, Berean Baptist Church
  The Infinity Initiative (Metairie)

Maryland
  Generation Hope (Baltimore)
  Montgomery County Commission for Women
  Parents Empowering Families & Communities
Massachusetts
Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts
Horizons for Homeless Children
Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy
Rainbow Solutions, Inc.

Michigan
Ecumenical Senior Center (Kalamazoo)
IHM Justice, Peace and Sustainability Office
Michigan’s Children

Minnesota
Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting
Pro-Choice Resources
Kids Avenue Learning Center (Faribault)
The Emily Program Foundation (St. Paul)
KOOTASCA Community Action (Itasca and Koochiching Counties)

Missouri
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and Associates

Nebraska
Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Justice Team
Center for People in Need (Lincoln)

New Mexico
New Mexico Teen Pregnancy Coalition
New Mexico Voices for Children
Prosperity Works (Albuquerque)

New Jersey
Education Law Center
National Council of Jewish Women, NJ State Public Affairs Network

New York
Brooklyn Young Mothers’ Collective (Brooklyn)
Creative Alternatives of New York
Everywoman Opportunity Center, Inc.
Inwood House (New York City)
NY Universal Living Wage Warriors
SNAP Long Island (Patchogue)
YWCA of Binghamton & Broome County
YWCA of Brooklyn
YWCA Elmira & the Tiers
YWCA of the Greater Region, Inc.
YWCA of Rochester & Monroe County (Rochester and Monroe Counties)

North Carolina
Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina
Guilford County Nurse Family Partnership

Ohio
Ohio NOW Education and Legal Fund
Ohio Poverty Law Center
Positive Education Program
Public Children Services Association of Ohio
YWCA of Greater Cincinnati

Pennsylvania
  Coalition of Labor Union Women, Philadelphia
  Education Law Center
  National Organization for Women, Ni-Ta-Nee (Centre County)
  PathWays PA
  Pennsylvania NOW, Inc.
  Public Citizens for Children and Youth
  Women's Law Project (Philadelphia)
  YWCA Lancaster

Rhode Island
  Education Justice Council
  Rhode Island Alliance
  Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
  Westbay Community Action
  YWCA of Northern Rhode Island (Woonsocket)

Tennessee
  American Association of University Women, Tennessee

Washington
  Harrington House, Catholic Community Services
  New Horizons High School (Pasco)
  Parents Organizing For Welfare and Economic Rights (POWER)
  Vancouver Public Schools Teen Parent Program (Vancouver)

Wisconsin
  9to5 Milwaukee Working Women (Milwaukee)
  St. Matthew Justice & Human Concerns Committee

Virginia
  JustChildren Program, Legal Aid Justice Center
  People Incorporated of Virginia

Individuals

Theresa A. Edwards
Justice4Children, GA

Kendra Huard Fershee
Assistant Prof. of Law
University of North Dakota School of Law

Stefanie Mollborn
Assistant Professor of Sociology and Faculty, Institute of Behavioral Science (IBS)
University of Colorado at Boulder
Heather Price
Education Researcher
University of Notre Dame, Center for Research on Educational Opportunities

Maria C. Cano
Hostos Community College/ COPE Program
Bronx, NY

Debra Ring
Kansas State University

Kathryn A. Stone
Advocate for reproductive rights
West Virginia

Yolanda Soto
City University of New York