

CHAPTER 229

AN ACT establishing an Advisory Council on Adolescent Pregnancy, supplementing Title 26 of the Revised Statutes and making an appropriation.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.26:2-170 Findings, declarations relative to out-of-wedlock adolescent births.

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. Out-of-wedlock adolescent births are a serious problem facing the State of New Jersey and the nation;

b. A large number of adolescents ages 10-19 are having children with approximately one million adolescents in the United States becoming pregnant each year;

c. Adolescent pregnancy has serious medical consequences, including the following: adolescents are less likely than older mothers to obtain prenatal care as only half of the pregnant adolescents in New Jersey receive early prenatal care; pregnant teenagers are at excess risk for anemia, cervical trauma, premature delivery, prolonged or abrupt labor and maternal mortality; and children of adolescent mothers are more likely to have low birth weight, require further hospitalization and die in infancy;

d. Out-of-wedlock adolescent pregnancy has serious social consequences, including the following: adolescent mothers are more likely to live in poverty, receive public assistance, be a high school dropout and be unemployed as nearly 75% of all single mothers under age 25 live in poverty, approximately half of all women receiving AFDC from 1976-1992 were or had been teenage mothers, only slightly more than half of adolescents who become mothers finish high school and children of adolescent mothers experience excess rates of dropping out of school, incarceration, depression, premature sexual activity and out-of-wedlock births. As of 1992, 84% of all births to mothers under the age of 20 in New Jersey were out-of-wedlock, the sixth highest rate in the country;

e. Out-of-wedlock adolescent pregnancy imposes large economic costs to federal, state and local governments;

f. There is a need for a permanent body to confront the issue of out-of-wedlock adolescent pregnancy and to review policy proposals, such as the findings and recommendations presented in the 1988 report of the New Jersey Task Force on Adolescent Pregnancy; and

g. It is therefore necessary to establish an advisory council to determine the best methods of coordination and improvement of the services of State and local governmental, private and voluntary agencies, community organizations, and schools which seek to serve adolescents at high risk of pregnancy, pregnant adolescents, adolescent parents, and their families.

C.26:2-171 Advisory Council on Adolescent Pregnancy established.

2. a. There is established in the Executive Branch of the State Government an Advisory Council on Adolescent Pregnancy. For the purposes of complying with the provisions of Article V, Section IV, paragraph 1 of the New Jersey Constitution, the advisory council is allocated within the Department of Health and Senior Services, but notwithstanding that allocation, the advisory council shall be independent of any supervision or control by the department or by any board or officer thereof.

b. The advisory council shall consist of 23 members as follows: the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Senior Services, Human Services, Education, Community Affairs, and Labor, who shall serve as ex officio members, and 18 public members, four of whom shall be teenagers, including two teenage parents and two teenagers who are not parents, and fourteen of whom shall be representatives of community based religious, health and social service organizations which serve adolescents and health professionals and educators with recognized expertise in the field of adolescent pregnancy. Of the public members, three shall be appointed by the President of the Senate, no more than two of whom shall be of the same political party; three shall be appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, no more than two of whom shall be of the same political party; and 12 shall be appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate, no more than six of whom shall be of the same political party. The advisory council shall organize within 30 days after the appointment of its members. The members shall select one person from among them to serve as the chairperson and the members shall select a secretary, who need not be a member of the advisory council.

c. Each ex officio member may designate an employee of the member's department to represent the member at hearings of the advisory council. All designees may lawfully vote and otherwise act on behalf of the member for whom they constitute the designee.

d. Each public member shall be appointed for a term of three years, but of the members first appointed, six shall serve for a term of one year, six for a term of two years and six for a term of three years. Members shall serve until their successors are appointed and qualified. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments were made.

e. Members of the advisory council shall serve without compensation but, within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to it, shall be eligible for reimbursement of necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties.

f. The Department of Health and Senior Services shall provide such staff as the advisory council requests to carry out the purposes of this act.

C.26:2-172 Advisory council duties.

3. It shall be the duty of the advisory council to:

a. Review past policy proposals, including those contained in the 1988 report of the New Jersey Task Force on Adolescent Pregnancy;

b. Develop policy proposals for the State to prevent adolescent pregnancy, reduce out-of-wedlock births among adolescents and improve services to at-risk, pregnant, and parenting adolescents;

c. Assist with and promote a coordinated and comprehensive approach to the social, economic, and health problems of adolescent pregnancy and parenthood among public and private groups;

d. Collect information on ongoing and new efforts aimed at preventing adolescent pregnancy and improving services to at-risk, pregnant, and parenting adolescents;

e. Promote and encourage broad community input, communication and education regarding adolescent pregnancy;

f. Provide advice to local public and private agencies and schools seeking to mobilize local efforts designed to prevent adolescent pregnancies and assist adolescent parents; and

g. Coordinate activities generated by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and the Family Planning Program in the State Department of Health and Senior Services.

C.26:2-173 Assistance, services available.

4. The advisory council may call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the Legislature and officials and employees of any State, county or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, task force, or agency as may be required and made available for its purposes. It may also, within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to it, incur travel and miscellaneous expenses necessary for the performance of its duties.

C.26:2-174 Report to Governor, Legislature.

5. The advisory council shall report to the Governor and the Legislature biannually, or more frequently if deemed appropriate, on its activities, findings and recommendations for legislation, administrative action or other methods for preventing adolescent pregnancy, reducing out-of-wedlock births among adolescents and improving services related to adolescent pregnancy.

6. There is appropriated \$95,000 from the General Fund to the Advisory Council on Adolescent Pregnancy to effectuate the purposes of this act.

7. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved August 25, 1997.