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**Proponent Testimony**  
**House Bill 293**  
**House Health Committee**  
**Wednesday, November 18, 2009**

Madame Chair Boyd and Ranking Minority Member Rep. Wachtmann, thank you for this opportunity to present proponent testimony on The Ohio Prevention First Bill, House Bill 293.

Few would argue that one of the most important life decisions to be made – when and with whom to have a child – is best done with intention, thoughtfulness and joy. About half of all births in Ohio are the result of unintended pregnancies. The resulting financial costs to government and the private health insurance industry are great. It is estimated that teen childbearing cost the child welfare system at least \$2.3 billion nationally in 2004 alone. More importantly, the costs related to child well-being are also great.

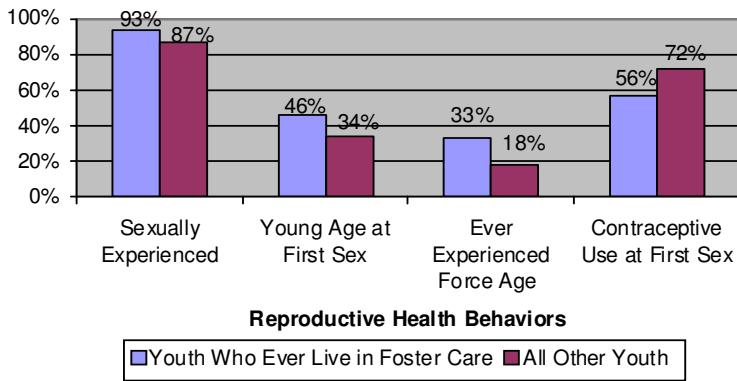
After a steady decline of 34% between 1991 and 2005, the teen birth rate has now *increased 5%* between 2005 and 2007, according to data released by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). Teen pregnancy rates are on the rise. We all agree that teen and unintended pregnancies are likely to disrupt educational aspirations, subsequently leading to lower family income or poverty.

In the field of child welfare, there is a correlation between unintended pregnancies, unprepared parents, and greater obstacles for children. At present, there are about half a million children living in foster care in the United States. These young people are at greater risk of early pregnancy than teens generally and many teens in foster care become parents, either while they are in the foster care system or shortly after transition out of the system. Through an article released this summer, Time Magazine describes teen pregnancy an epidemic in foster care. I have included a copy of the article in your packets.

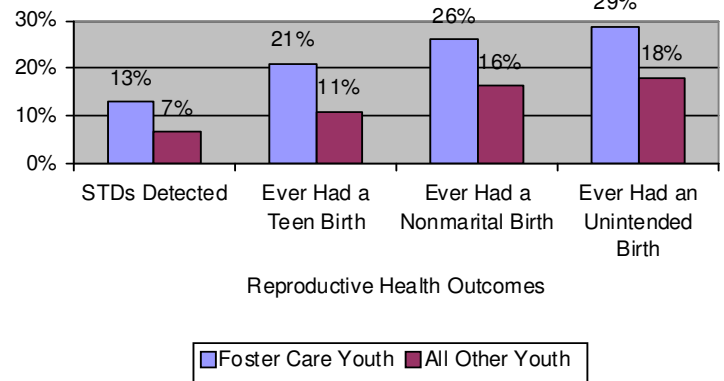
Statistics show:

- Families that have children born to teen parents are more likely to have open child welfare cases. One survey found one-third of all open cases had children born to teen parents.
- Children born to teens are more likely to be reported to child protective services and ultimately end up in foster care.
- Foster youth are 2.5 times more likely to get pregnant as teens, than other teens
- Sexually active teens who age out of foster care are less likely to report using condoms or birth control within a year of aging out.
- Half of young men, 21 years old who have aged out of foster care report that they have gotten someone pregnant compared to 19 percent of their peers who were not in the system.

### Reproductive Health Behaviors Among Young Adults (Age 18-26)



### Reproductive Health Outcomes in Young Adulthood (Age 18-26) Among All Youth



A report released this year by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy found that almost half of the children in foster care had sex for the first time before age 16, compared with 30% of their peers not in foster care. They're also more likely to have experienced forced sex and less likely to use contraception. The results in the charts above show that youth who have ever lived in foster care tend to experience a higher incidence of teen and non-marital births.

The "Ohio Prevention First Act" requires that insurance companies cover prescription birth control if they cover other prescriptions. It would also improve women's access to emergency contraception and ensure that students receive comprehensive, accurate sex education.

This legislation would help to break this cycle for foster youth by preventing unintended pregnancies. Perhaps the most important asset teenagers need to avoid early parenthood is a strong relationship with parents or other adults in their lives. But these are precisely the kinds of bonds that many foster teens lack. PCSAO strongly believes foster youth, all youth, should hear a clear and coordinated message about sex from adults, whether it's their foster parents, mentors, teachers, coaches or faith based-institutions. The statistics show that some foster youth are having sex, which makes it essential to teach them about how to develop healthy relationships and protect their bodies.

Young people should abstain from and delay sex. They should understand sex has consequences, and how biology works, and they should be prepared with good contraceptive and STD prevention information - so that when they do have sex, they'll be having safe sex. This bill will go a long way to ensure that this happens for our youth.

Child outcomes are greatly improved when children are born to parents who are prepared physically, emotionally, and financially. Healthy families are a value embraced by all – conservatives and progressives, faith-based groups and educators, the media, and the general public. Reducing unintended pregnancies will promote that happiest of all events – the birth of a child to those who are ready and willing to parent.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak before you today. I am willing to answer any questions you may have at this time.