

August 7, 2015

Dear Members of Congress,

As expectant and parenting youth, the people who are in families and communities with them, and the organizations who work with young parents, we call on members of Congress to support the Young Parents' Dignity Agenda, a commitment to federal legislation and policies that provide expectant and parenting youth the respect, recognition, and resources they need to continue building a successful foundation for their families.

Young parents, like all parents, need fair employment, educational opportunities, healthcare, housing, and childcare in order to be successful. Unfortunately, expectant and parenting youth face discriminatory practices and inequities in the workplace, in educational settings, and in access to healthcare, and often struggle with homelessness or lack of affordable childcare. In 2010, only 50 percent of young mothers were able to receive their high school diploma by the time they reached the age of 22.ⁱ In the workplace, expectant and parenting youth are over-represented in low wage jobs where they may be more likely to experience pregnancy discrimination. In fact, women ages 16 to 24, including women of color, are 18.3 percent of workers in these jobs.ⁱⁱ Immigrant expectant and parenting youth, including those authorized to live and work in the United States, often cannot access healthcare and insurance coverage because of their immigration status. More than 1.5 million undocumented, immigrant men and women are between the ages of 19 to 24,ⁱⁱⁱ and many more are lawfully present. Finally, expectant and parenting youth struggle to secure childcare and housing for their families, making it harder for them to pursue their educational goals.

The Young Parents' Dignity Agenda includes a commitment to five key issues, exemplified by following legislative and budgetary policies:

- **Fair Employment:** The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) (H.R. 2654/S. 1512), which will ensure that reasonable accommodations are available to expectant youth who need them to continue working safely during pregnancy; and the Schedules that Work Act (STWA) (H.R. 3071/S. 1772), which would ensure that young parents in the workforce have predictable schedules and some say in when they work so that they are able to plan their lives—including spending time with their children, arranging child care, and going to school.
- **Education and Opportunity:** The Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act (S. 416), which would help improve high school graduation rates by providing schools with resources and tools to help their expectant and parenting students succeed in school; and the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, in which Congress should include provisions – around financial aid, campus-based child care, and lactation accommodations, for example – that support student parents' access to and completion of post-secondary programs.
- **Healthcare for All:** The Health Equity and Access under the Law (HEAL) for Immigrant Women and Families Act (H.R. 4240), which would restore health coverage and remove politically created barriers to healthcare so that immigrants, including immigrant youth, can participate in the healthcare programs their tax dollars support.
- **Access to Child Care and Early Education for Children:** Increased investments in important child care and early education programs, including increases of at least \$1 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, \$1.52 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start, \$500 million for Preschool Development Grants, \$65 million for Grants for Infants and

Families (Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and \$50 million for
Preschool Grants (Part B, Section 619 under IDEA).

- **Affordable Housing:** The Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 576/S. 276), which would eliminate barriers to accessing HUD homeless assistance programs for homeless children and youth by aligning federal definitions of homelessness, and allowing communities to use HUD homeless assistance funds to meet the needs that they identify; and the Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act (S. 262/H.R. 1779), which would reauthorize a program that provides emergency shelter, transitional housing, and street outreach programs to youth, including LGBTQ youth.

We support The Young Parents' Dignity Agenda and strongly urge Congressional members to do the same. We know that when we give expectant and parenting youth and their families the information, resources, and supports they need, their families will thrive.

Sincerely,

9to5, National Association of Working Women

ACT for Women and Girls

Advocates for Youth

AIDS Alabama

AIDS Alliance for Women, Infants, Children, Youth & Families

Alliance for a Just Society

Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations

Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR)

Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc.

Equal Rights Advocates

Family Equality Council

First Shift Justice Project

FORGE, Inc.

Forward Together - Strong Families

Healthy Teen Network

Housing Choice Sec8 Advisory Board

Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health

Immigrant Service Providers Group/Health
Institute for Science and Human Values
League of United Latin American Citizens
Legal Voice
Marriage Equality USA
Maryland Family Network
MomsRising
Mothering Justice
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Organization for Women
National Women's Law Center
New Mexico Voices for Children
PFLAG National
Reproductive Health Access Project
Reproductive Justice Collective
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
Somerville High School
Southwest Women's Law Center
Summit Health Institute for Research and Education, Inc.

The Center for Sexual Pleasure and Health

The Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy

The National Crittenton Foundation

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity

Young Women United

ⁱ 1. J. Egan, L.S. Kaufmann. National Women's Law Center. Executive Summary. A Pregnancy Test for Schools: The Impact of Education Laws on Expectant and Parenting Students; 2012:1. Available here: <http://www.nwlc.org/reports-overview/pregnancy-test-schools-impact-education-laws-expectant-and-parenting-students>.

ⁱⁱ National Women's Law Center. Underpaid and Overloaded: Women in Low-Wage Jobs; 2014. Available here: http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/final_nwlc_lowwagereport2014.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ R. Capps et al. Migration Policy Institute. A Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Health Coverage Profile of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States; 2013: 3. Available here: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/demographic-socioeconomic-and-health-coverage-profile-unauthorized-immigrants-united-states>.