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## **Provocative Report Links Attitudes and Behavior of Boys and Young Men in DC to Teen Pregnancy**

Washington, DC—DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy today released a groundbreaking report that examines attitudes, behavior, and risk factors among boys and young men in the District of Columbia—*In Our Own Words: The Lives of Boys and Young Men in the District of Columbia*. The new report makes a series of community-wide recommendations focused on promoting changes in policies affecting boys, encouraging their positive relationships with caring adults, and supporting them in avoiding risky behavior (see attachment).

DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a community-wide collaboration whose mission is to cut the District's teen pregnancy rate in half by 2005. Currently, one in eight teenage girls in DC becomes pregnant each year. While teen pregnancy prevention efforts traditionally focus on teenage girls and their behavior, this new report provides strong evidence that addressing the risk factors affecting young men is equally as important to solving this public health crisis.

“From the beginning we have emphasized the importance of including boys and young men in teen pregnancy prevention,” said Brenda Rhodes Miller, executive director of DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. “It is girls who get pregnant, but decisions about sex and contraception involve two partners. *In Our Own Words* makes it clear that we must address the needs of young men and involve them in teen pregnancy prevention.”

The report is based on information compiled in 1999 and 2000 during DC Campaign's first two years of operation. Sources include a roundtable panel of young men who discussed their health care concerns, six focus groups with adolescent boys, several “Teen Town Hall” meetings, and a landmark public opinion survey conducted by DC-based Lake Snell Perry and Associates. That survey polled 1,600 DC residents aged 11 and over, held 22 focus groups with teens, pre-teens, and parents, and conducted interviews with community leaders.

*In Our Own Words* examines the every day realities facing boys and young men in the District of Columbia—including exposure to violence, drug use and abuse, poverty, public education that fails to meet their needs, and their inability to access health care. Based upon its underlying research, the report concludes that these factors, coupled with the need for better parent-teen relationships, lead boys to engage in unprotected sex and other risky behavior.

According to Miller, “We believe that all boys in DC must be provided the knowledge and support they need to achieve their full potential to grow up to be productive members of the community. We also know that adult men must play a central role in making this happen.”

The report contains specific examples how parents, government, and community organizations, can get involved. For more information, see attached summaries of key findings and recommendations, contact DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy at 202-789-4666, or visit [www.teenpregnancydc.org](http://www.teenpregnancydc.org).

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DC Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy was established in 1999 and grew out of the work of the Mayor’s Committee to Reduce Teen Pregnancies and Out-of-Wedlock Births. The mission of DC Campaign is to reduce the teen pregnancy rate in the District of Columbia by 50 percent by 2005. The organization acts as a transfer agent for skills, a lever to increase financial support, a conveyor of experts and networks, a promoter of best practices, and a training resource. It accomplishes these goals by mobilizing teens, drawing attention to teen pregnancy prevention, engaging neighborhoods, supporting local programs, and keeping track of the facts about teen pregnancy.

**Key Findings from *In Our Own Words:*  
*The Lives of Boys and Young Men in the District of Columbia***

- Teens report that those who are very involved in sports, church or school activities are less likely to be sexually involved, and more likely to protect themselves if they are.
- By a two to one margin, District boys agree it is better to encourage teens to put off sex until they are older and more mature, rather than telling them to wait for marriage.
- Approaches that are built on blaming males for risky behavior, or that seek to scare them into responsible behavior, often produce defiance or defensiveness.
- Teen and preteen boys in the District feel that access to birth control is vital if the teen pregnancy rate is to be lowered.
- Adolescents who use a condom at first intercourse are far more likely to continue using condoms than those who do not.
- 87% of District boys support making condoms widely available to teens as a means of pregnancy prevention.
- The vast majority of teen boys in the District (85%) agree that it is *very* important for parents to be involved in teen pregnancy prevention.
- There is near unanimous support among teen boys (94%) and their parents (94%) for creating programs to teach parents how to talk to their children about sexually issues.
- Sexual risk-taking often takes place in the context of other risky behaviors like drinking, substance abuse, and violence.
- 66% of boys 15 to 18 say they have had intercourse; 34% of boys 11-14 say they have had intercourse.
- Many boys feel pressure to not only lose their virginity, but to sleep with as many girls as possible.
- Only 6 in 10 sexually active District boys say they use birth control *every* time they have sex.
- Because boys and young men have so often been left out of the health care system, they have not had the opportunity for routine, preventive, and reproductive health information and care.

**Key Recommendations from *In our own Words:*  
*The Lives of Boys and Young Men in the District of Columbia***

1. The District of Columbia must have health care services that meet the needs of boys and young men.
2. Parents must be more involved in the lives of their sons.
3. Remembering that research strongly connects school failure with health problems and risky behavior, the District of Columbia community must keep pressure on the school system to retain and educate all boys.
4. Families, government, community organizations, schools, and churches must join forces to give every boy an opportunity for safe, productive, and supervised out-of-school activities.
5. Programs that work with boys on a consistent basis must be supported and expanded.