

Teen Pregnancy Issues Addressed

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Special to the Informer

Social Services advocates say they are determined to hold District officials accountable in the spending of bonus monies from the federal government due to successes in the city's welfare-to-work program.

The District, along with Alabama and Michigan recently received a \$25 million Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) bonus for reducing out-of-wedlock births. The bonus monies were part of the 1996 federal welfare reform law, which encourage and allow states to pursue family formation and teen pregnancy goals in addition to welfare-to-work goals.

This is the third consecutive year the city has received the bonus, having received \$20 million in 1999 and an additional \$20 million in 2000 for a total of \$65 million in bonus monies.

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"This is a remarkable accomplishment that deserves praise," said Brenda Miller, of the D.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. "It also presents an opportunity to invest those funds wisely in proven, cost-effective teen pregnancy prevention programs," she added.

Still, activists are discouraged by the slow pace that District teens are getting the teen prevention message. Out of a total of 50,000 teens, the District still leads the nation in teen pregnancies with rates that are nearly twice the national average. And although the rate had been falling steadily from its peak of 238 per 1000 women ages 15 to 19 in 1993, it took a sharp turn upward in 1998-99 from 122.7 per 1,000 to 134.4 per 1,000.

A coalition of local non-profit organizations have joined Miller to galvanize support to direct more funds towards organizations that focus on teen pregnancy. Further-



(Bottom left) Brenda Miller, standing, greets other community activists at meeting to address teen pregnancy in the District; (above) Miller discusses issue with J.L. Epstein, K. Moore, and T. Cheng.

PHOTOS BY TARIK BELL

more, they are demanding that Mayor Anthony Williams and his administration be more forthcoming about where the federal monies are spent.

"The District budget doesn't provide information that identifies how the TANF funds have been spent in the past, or are to be

spent in the coming year," Miller said. "We are calling on the District government to be accountable to its citizens."

The D.C. Campaign is one of more than 100 community-based organizations that serve the city's adolescent and youth community, others include D.C. Action for

Children, The Summit Fund of Washington, National Partners from the Center of Law and Social Policy, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, Child Trends, Inc., and the National Organization on Pregnancy, Par-

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enting and Prevention. All have worked with the D.C. Campaign to in developing recommendations for TANF fund use.

The recommendations include:
* a \$12 million allotment for Primary prevention and Youth Development programs includ-

ing a comprehensive youth development program in each part of the city.

* \$10 million in Secondary prevention programs including supplemental funding for existing adolescent health clinics in the city that currently work with pregnant and parenting teens :

* \$3-million in Adolescent Health Care reform to expand support to publicly funded clin-

ics in implementing outreach and family planning services to adolescents.

In addition, supporters say it is more effective to help teens avoid welfare by preventing pregnancy in the present, rather than applying after the fact remedies.

"It is more cost effective to prevent teen pregnancy in the first place then to subsidize the con-

