

### The Teen Endangerment Bill SB 97

This bill threatens a minor's life and health by dangerously restricting the most vulnerable teens' access to abortion services, such as those who are abused, victims of incest or in foster care. The bill makes parental consent impossible for some parents by requiring notarized consent and a government issued identification in order to consent. This bill does nothing to reduce the incidents of teen pregnancy. Rather, the Teen Endangerment Bill serves to isolate the pregnant teen from seeking assistance from trusted adults such as a relative, clergy member or psychologist.

#### **WISCONSIN'S CURRENT PARENTAL CONSENT LAW WORKS**

Wisconsin does currently have a parental consent law which has been in effect for 14 years. Under this law, prior to an abortion, a minor must obtain:

- the written consent of a parent, legal guardian or other adult family member older than 25, which includes a sibling, aunt, uncle or grandparent, or a foster parent or treatment foster parent who has the authority to consent to medical services or treatment on behalf of the minor; or
- A psychiatrist or psychologist's opinion that the minor is suicidal; or
- A judicial bypass, which allows a clergy member to act on behalf of a minor in obtaining judicial approval for a minor's abortion.

Additionally, a minor does not need consent if in a physician's opinion, a medical emergency exists that complicates the pregnancy.

Provisions allowing trusted adult family members to consent, physicians to consent in the case of feared suicide or medical emergency and trusted clergy to assist with obtaining a judicial bypass were included in current law for important reasons: to protect the health and well-being of a young pregnant woman who, on the infrequent occasion, confides in a trusted adult but not a parent.

Though parents should be involved in their child's decision regarding abortion, current parental consent law recognizes that this important communication does not occur in every family. In some families, grandparents or siblings are raising the minor in a parent's absence. A child may be living out of the parental home because of abuse or neglect issues. Current law encourages a minor to receive important adult counseling and support from relatives or clergy members in instances when parents are unavailable. The Teen Endangerment Act takes these protections away.

#### **THE TEEN ENDANGERMENT ACT PUNISHES AND ISOLATES PREGNANT TEENS**

Tragic incidents in Wisconsin and around the country reveal what happens when young pregnant women are desperate to end their pregnancies but feel too isolated and afraid to seek help or adult counsel.

The Teen Endangerment Act further isolates pregnant teens and eliminates important protections that could save a teen's life. The Teen Endangerment Act removes:

- Relative consent provisions, even when parental abuse or incest has occurred. Almost one-third of teens who do not involve a parent have histories of violence, fear the occurrence of violence, or are afraid of being forced to leave their homes;

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- A foster parent's ability to consent, even when the parent with legal custody can not be located, is incarcerated, has a history of abusing or neglecting the teen or is otherwise unavailable. The children in foster care are sometimes the most vulnerable and should not be required to locate an absent parent;
- A clergy assistance provision which encourages a teen to seek help from a trusted clergy member; and
- Removing important safeguards to protect young women who are at risk of suicide.

The bill also strictly redefines the medical emergency exception to make it more difficult for a physician to conclude that a medical emergency exists. Imposing these additional restrictions on young women's access to abortion will increase unsafe and self-induced abortion, family violence, suicide, later abortions, and unintended childbirth. The Teen Endangerment Act also will increase the risks for physically and sexually abused teens in particular, who are already in dangerous situations.

### **THE TEEN ENDANGERMENT MAKES PARENTAL CONSENT IMPOSSIBLE IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS**

Though the proponents allege that they are advancing the bill "so that parents are truly aware and involved in their minor's daughter's decision," the text of the bill reveals that its proponents do not trust parents. The bill actually imposes more burdens on parents by requiring:

- Notarized parental consent. This compromises a family's medical privacy regarding the most personal medical decisions.
- Parents to produce government issued identification. Parents who do not possess government issued identification would have no right to consent to their daughter's abortion.

### **STUDY AFTER STUDY DEMONSTRATES THAT PUNATIVE ABORTION RESTRICTIONS COMPROMISE A TEEN'S LIFE AND HEALTH**

The Teen Endangerment Act puts the health and lives of young women at risk by creating impossible logistical barriers. Stringent laws severely limiting a minor's access to abortion delay the procedure and increase the health risk for the minor.

- In Minnesota, the proportion of second-trimester abortions among minors increased by 18 percent following enactment of a parental notification law.
- After Missouri's parental consent law went into effect in 1985, the proportion of second-trimester abortions among minors increased from 19 percent in 1985 to 23 percent in 1988.

### **THE TEEN ABANDONMENT BILL DOES NOTHING TO PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY**

It is important to note that the proponents of this bill do NOT support the very programs that have been shown to reduce the teen pregnancy rates. Research shows that comprehensive, medically accurate sex education and increased access to birth control reduces teen pregnancy. Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin will be working with organizations throughout the state to advance a Teen Pregnancy Prevention Package that promotes programs that work to reduce teen pregnancy instead of measures that punish and isolate pregnant teens like the Teen Endangerment Act.