

Press Release
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Save the Children Philippines and Advocates Clamor for Urgent Passage of Teen Pregnancy Prevention Bill

Save the Children Philippines, in collaboration with government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and passionate adolescent advocates, has issued a compelling plea for the prompt enactment of the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bill. This legislative initiative aims to empower adolescents to prioritize education and health over parenthood, highlighting the urgent need for proactive measures to combat adolescent pregnancy rates nationwide.

During a recent press briefing, stakeholders underscored the critical need for inclusive sexual health dialogues within communities and government institutions. The proposed bill garnered support from key organizations, including the Department of Education, Commission on the Welfare of Children, Commission on Population and Development, Family Planning Organization of the Philippines, Philippine Legislators Committee on Population and Development, Young Feminist Collective, Oxfam Pilipinas, and Global OFW Advance Movement.

Government reports highlight a troubling trend: an increase in pregnancies among girls aged 10-14. Between 2016 and 2020, there was an 11% rise in registered births to mothers in this age group, translating to an average of 5-7 births daily. According to data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2020), 59.5% of these births were fathered by adult men aged 20 and over, representing nearly 6 out of every 10 adolescent births. Alarmingly, about 1 in every 5 registered adolescent births lacks information about the father's age. This issue is particularly pronounced among the 10-14 age group, where over 40% of adolescent births lack father's age information, compared to just 17% in the 15-19 age group.

Amid these concerning statistics, various advocates have spoken out about the need for comprehensive education and open dialogue on sexual health. Sydney, a passionate adolescent advocate, emphasized that open conversations about sexual health within families and communities are not indecent but a fundamental right. Sydney stressed that sexual health encompasses broader rights beyond mere activity and should be discussed openly and respectfully.

In addition to Sydney's advocacy, Julia Mari, representing the Young Feminists Collective, underscored the importance of honoring motherhood by empowering young people to make informed decisions about parenthood. According to Julia, the bill seeks to safeguard the future by equipping youth with the knowledge and resources necessary for their well-being and success.

Furthermore, Pastor Jo Biasong, a family planning advocate and evangelist, highlighted the need to establish safe and supportive spaces within religious congregations. Pastor Jo emphasized that child protection is integral to fostering open dialogue and enabling children to advocate for their rights within church communities.

From a governmental perspective, Assistant Secretary Dexter Galban of the Department of Education emphasized the critical link between adolescent pregnancy and overall well-being. Secretary Galban highlighted the implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the Department of Education (DepEd), beginning with age-appropriate information and progressing as learners mature. This initiative aims to prioritize youth and contribute to national development.

Echoing the need for innovative solutions, Undersecretary Angelo Tapales of the Council for the Welfare of Children stressed the necessity for new approaches to address these challenges. He emphasized the importance of trusting children to make decisions that are best for them.

In a call to action, Acting Division Chief Mylin Mirasol Quiray of the Commission on Population and Development urged Malacañang to re-issue Executive Order 141, making adolescent pregnancy a national priority beyond family concerns. Chief Quiray emphasized the significant impact of adolescent pregnancy on girls' lives and the national economy.

The legislative response to this issue has seen varying levels of progress. The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bill (HB 8910) received overwhelming support in the Lower House with 232 affirmative votes. However, its Senate counterpart, Senate Bill 1979, faces uncertainty as it awaits consideration for the Second Reading.

Advocates stress the urgency of passing the bill. Aurora Quilala, Deputy Executive Director of the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development, cited extensive consultations and alignment with ground realities, underscoring the critical need for legislative action.

With Congress soon adjourning and reconvening in July, advocates are urgently pressing for the bill's passage. They particularly urge the Senate to conduct the Second Reading promptly. Immediate action is crucial before the legislative session pauses for recess until after the State of the Nation Address in July and shifts attention to re-election campaigns in October. Advocates emphasize the critical importance of advancing this legislation swiftly to address the pressing issue of adolescent pregnancy in the Philippines.

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