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Media contact: Soo Ji Min
office: 312-427-4460 x225, mobile: 312-671-0612
email: sooji@icah.org

Young Parents, Advocates Call for Policy Change
Reform Measures Would Support Young Parents in Realizing Their Academic Goals

CHICAGO – Today more than 125 young parents, advocates, school employees, community members, policymakers and Chicago Public Schools officials gathered to begin a dialogue on the needed policy changes to better serve pregnant and parenting youth in Chicago schools.

“Being a young father is not an easy thing. I have dealt with negative criticism from my peers, discouragement from school staff, personal doubt, stereotypes and financial and emotional problems,” said Terrance Hooker, a 19-year old father, and member of the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health’s Young Parent Alliance (YPA).

“Pregnant and parenting youth need support to remain in school and complete their educational goals,” agreed 19-year old mother and YPA member Taquita Brown. “Being a young parent does not trap you in poverty; not finishing your education does.”

Young parents like Hooker and Brown face significant challenges as they balance the demands of completing their educational goals, caring for their children, navigating their own adolescence and trying to forge a safe and healthy future for themselves. Nearly 60 percent of young women who give birth during their school-age years drop out of high school at some point.

Hooker and Brown were joined by advocates at *Young, Smart and Pregnant: Overcoming Barriers to Academic Success*, a policy forum and roundtable co-sponsored by the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health (ICAH) and the Urban Initiative at the National Institute for Reproductive Health. Among other reform measures, attendees urged Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to adopt the “Pregnant and Parenting Youth Bill of Rights,” which would put into place protections, educational measures, and a grievance procedure for students whose rights were violated.

“CPS has an opportunity to help ensure a safe and supportive school environment for young parents and expectant parents,” said Soo Ji Min, Executive Director of ICAH. “We consistently hear from young parents that having children only strengthens their motivation to complete high school, but they face numerous barriers along the way. Adopting the Bill of Rights is a key first step in helping young parents overcome these barriers.”

Advocates also called for the passage of The Pregnant and Parenting Students Access to Education Act (H.R. 5894) in the U.S. House of Representatives, which would provide funding for states and school districts across the country to states and school districts to increase school-based support for pregnant and parenting students, aiming to improve high school graduation rates, access to post-secondary education, and career-readiness for pregnant and parenting students.

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The Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, in partnership with youth, advocates sound policies and practices that promote a positive approach to adolescent sexual health and parenting. Visit www.icah.org to learn more.

The National Reproductive Health Institute’s Urban Initiative for Reproductive Health is a groundbreaking, multi-year initiative to create and promote real policy solutions to address the reproductive health challenges facing cities today.