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New Teen Birth Data Highlights a Tale of Two Cities

Boston, MA – Newly released teen birth data from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health shows an 11% decline in births to teens since 2007, pushing the Massachusetts teen birth rate to its lowest in decades. Still, the teen birth rate for Hispanic teens in Massachusetts is more than 5 times the rate for whites. In Boston, the Department of Public Health reports that the teen birth rate for Hispanic 18-19 year olds is 19 times that for white 18-19 year olds in the city.

“The continued decline in teen births overall proves that preventing teen pregnancy is a winnable battle,” says Patricia Quinn, executive director of the Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy. “But we cannot be satisfied when such stark disparities persist. Teens of all race/ethnicities deserve the chance to reach their own potential, to pursue education and meaningful work, before they have to focus on raising a child.”

Holyoke reported the highest teen birth rate in Massachusetts, at 96.8 per 1,000 teen girls aged 15-19—almost 5 times the state rate. Communities like Holyoke, Lynn, and Lowell have seen teen birth rates trending up in recent years, following strong declines in the late 1990s and the begin of the millennium. Community data is available to assist cities and towns in understanding specific challenges. For example, almost 40% of births to teens in Lawrence were to teens aged 15-17, compared to 29% statewide. In Southbridge, almost half (48.4%) of teen births were to teens under 18.

Currently, school districts are not required to provide sex education, and though teen pregnancy prevention, family planning, and school-based health care survived the FY12 budget process, funding levels are still far below what was available 10 years ago. “We need to make sure that every young person has access to comprehensive sex education, that sexually active young people have support for the use of condoms and contraceptives, and that all youth have a clear path to adult identity with motivation to delay parenting,” says Quinn.

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