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06 February 2023

The Honorable Senator Risa Hontiveros

Chairperson, Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and
Gender Equality
The Senate of the Philippines
GSIS Bldg., Financial Center
Diokno Blvd., Pasay City

Subject: Senate Bill Nos. 372, 651 and 1209

Dear Chairperson Hontiveros:

We understand that your Committee will be conducting a hearing to consider Senate Bill No. 372 entitled "An Act Providing for a National Policy in Preventing Adolescent Pregnancies, Institutionalizing Social Protection for Adolescent Parents, and Providing Funds Therefor", Senate Bill No. 651 entitled "An Act Providing a National Policy on the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy, and Appropriating Funds Therefor" and Senate Bill No. 1209 entitled "An Act Providing for a National Policy in Preventing Adolescent Pregnancies, Institutionalizing Social Protection for Adolescent Parents, and Providing Funds Therefor".

We are attaching our Position Paper in opposition to these bills.

Thank you very much for your consideration of our views.

Very truly yours,

MARIA CONCEPCION S. NOCHE
President

EILEEN Z. ARANETA
Senior Vice-President

Position Paper on Senate Bill Nos. 372, 651 and 1209 Providing a National Policy in Preventing Teenage/Adolescent Pregnancies

The Alliance for the Family Foundation Philippines, Inc. (“ALFI”) recognizes the challenges and difficulties that adolescent pregnancies entail for young people and for families, as highlighted in the rationale for Senate Bills 372, 651 and 1209, and shares the concern over adolescent pregnancy rate in the country.

Although there has been a dramatic decline in adolescent pregnancy rate in recent years¹, ALFI supports the legislative initiatives to help sustain the decline.

Today’s teens are affronted with a myriad of external and internal pressures, contemporary ideas and conflicting beliefs that can pose a huge challenge to a discerning yet naive mind. In fact, physically, teenagers’ brains are still developing: the area of the brain that controls their ability to think and reason, the prefrontal cortex, is still immature.

Without proper education, guidance and supervision, teenagers, if left to their own, will tend to act on emotions and impulse. This makes them prone to “misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions, get into accidents of all kinds, and engage in dangerous or risky behavior”² according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

It is ALFI’s belief that our youth will continue to need parental guidance and supervision, as well as education and formation in character, personhood and decision-making skills, as they continue to grow and develop to become independent and responsible adults in the future.

It is in this light that ALFI raises concerns with three bills in particular, SB 372, SB 651, and SB 1209, titled Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Act with its overall approach and response to the problem.

ALFI believes that Sexuality is not about reproductive health and sexual behavior mainly, but about aligning sexual behavior and actions with a greater sense of responsibility, integrity and respect for self and others.

We believe that a Comprehensive Sexuality Education should be about forming first the person’s inner value system, and NOT about exercising one’s sexual rights and freedom of expression.

We believe that parents have the best interest over the wellbeing of the child and this should be preserved, upheld and respected by the State at all times. No child should be allowed to make significant personal decisions independent of the guidance and supervision of the parents. In this respect, we assert *the natural and primary right and duty of parents in rearing the youth for civic efficiency and the development of moral character*,³ guaranteed by the Constitution.

¹ Data from Philippine Statistics Authority from 2015 to 2020 show an average of 5% annual decline in the number of teenage pregnancy

² “Teen Brain: Behavior, Problem Solving, and Decision Making,” *American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, no. 95 (September 2017).

³ Section 12, Article II, 1987 Philippine Constitution

Specifically, the approach of these bills to the problem of teenage pregnancy tend to be superficial, if not off-tangent, and should be debated and scrutinized:

1. On Declaration of Policy

- a. The underlying purpose of the law is NOT the promotion or protection of a human right, nor is it providing teens with the opportunity to make decisions for themselves prematurely in life whilst they are still under parental authority. It is **about inculcating a deeper understanding of Human Sexuality and how it relates to their personhood**, the underlying values that accompany any person's behavior and action, and how it needs to be properly ordered so as not to give free reign to "adolescents' biological needs and preferences" and the alchemy of their fleeting emotions and impulses.
- b. The purpose is NOT about providing information on how to have "SAFE SEX", as it regards pregnancy like a disease to be avoided. It is about helping teens understand the role and proper use of their reproductive gifts beyond a mere expression of sexual rights.
- c. The purpose is NOT to provide universal access to reproductive health care services to prevent unintended pregnancy. It is about educating their decision-making skills so that they avoid risky, irresponsible behaviors that can pose life-long consequences.

2. On Definition of Terms

- a. Adolescent Sexuality is not mainly centered on the reproductive system. The right word, in fact, is Human Sexuality which refers to the successful integration and unity of all biological and reproductive responses of the body with the person's well-formed value system and moral compass, ensuring the integrity of one's behavior and actions.
The strong emphasis of the underlying values that accompany every action of the person is the heart of integral human development. This should likewise guide the approach in educating teens on Human Sexuality.
- b. Comprehensive Sexuality Education should, essentially and primarily, be designed as a values education program to allow teens to apply the right perspective on matters relating to sex, relationships, human dignity, etc. CSE should help them develop critical thinking skills so they can align their affections, impulses, desires according to higher order human values.

3. On Age and Development-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education

The development of a Comprehensive Adolescent Sexuality Education (CASE) should NOT have, as its end goal, that of "normalizing discussions of sex and gender". This has no direct connection with the aim of curbing teenage pregnancy.

Neither should it include new ideologies on gender identity and expression. There are all too frequent mentions of “gender equality and equity” in the bills which is completely unrelated to the concern of curbing teenage pregnancy.

Neither should CASE be designed to strengthen the exercise of rights and freedom for teens, particularly for those below age of emancipation.

The learning goal is VALUES-BASED NOT rights-based. It is about learning to order feelings and fantasies. Teens are still forming their own attitudes and value systems, and until this is well formed and solidified, there is little basis to assume that they can take full responsibility over their own sexual behavior. No reproductive right exists for any teen, nor for anyone for that matter, except the right to behave responsibly and with integrity guided by a well formed, upright value system.

4. On Training, Access to Services, Implementation Structures

The primacy of parental authority over the minors under their care and responsibility must be upheld. The law cannot usurp parental authority because no other person has the best interest of the child in mind but the parents. Children and teens are still considered dependents, and as such, parents have to be consulted at all times. We therefore challenge the bills as they deny parents their authority and exclude them in the implementation of their programs and services.

In conclusion, ALFI agrees that the teenage pregnancy problem in the country needs more pressing attention from parents and support from government. However, the approach and perspective of SB 372, SB 651, and SB 1209, we believe, do not serve the best interest of adolescent children and are contrary to the Constitutional mandate for the State *to promote and protect the physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being*⁴ of the youth.

We therefore urge the proponents of the bills to collaborate more with parents in developing the appropriate and responsible solution to the teenage pregnancy problem. We believe that the right formation should be values-based. This is how we can help our youth grow into adulthood making more responsible decisions on matters of love, sex and relationships.

⁴ Section 13, Article II, 1987 Philippine Constitution