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16 March 2026

The Honorable Rep. Faustino Michael Carlos T. Dy III
Chairperson, Committee on Youth and Sports Development
3/F Ramon V. Mitra Building
House of Representatives
Constitution Hills, Quezon City 1126

**Subject: Various House Bills Providing a National Policy in Preventing
Teenage/Adolescent Pregnancies**

Dear Chairperson Dy:


We understand that your Committee will be conducting a meeting to discuss House Bills Providing a National Policy in Preventing Teenage/ Adolescent Pregnancies.

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 House Bills
Providing for a National Policy in Preventing Teenage/Adolescent Pregnancies and
Institutionalizing Social Protection for Adolescent Parents

1. The Alliance for the Family Foundation Philippines, Inc. (“ALFI”) recognizes the challenges and difficulties that adolescent pregnancies entail for young people and their families, as highlighted in the rationale of the various Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bills. The rising adolescent pregnancy rate is indeed a concern that must be addressed appropriately and in a manner consistent with the intrinsic dignity of the human person and the invaluable role and place of parental authority in rearing the youth.

2. Today’s teens are confronted with a myriad of external and internal pressures, contemporary ideas and conflicting beliefs that can pose a huge challenge to a discerning yet inexperienced 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.

3. Without proper education, guidance and supervision, teenagers, if left to their own, will tend to act based 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”¹ according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

4. 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. The primacy of the role of parents in the development of adolescents must continue to be recognized and supported by the State.

5. We believe that parents have the best and primary interest over the well-being 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*,² guaranteed by the Constitution.

6. It must be clear that, for matters as intimate as sexuality and sexuality education, it is the parents that have the primary right and duty to give education and guidance, in accordance with their family values, religion, and beliefs. The State must not unnecessarily interfere with this and present solutions that may be contrary to the parents’ direction and discretion.

¹ “Teen Brain: Behavior, Problem Solving, and Decision Making,” *American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, no. 95 (September 2017).

² Section 12, Article II, 1987 Philippine Constitution

7. It is in this light that ALFI raises concerns with some of the bills' overall approach and response to the problem of adolescent pregnancy, particularly the apparent emphasis and reliance on Adolescent Sexual Health and Reproductive Health.

8. As defined in the various bills, this will enable adolescents to access a full range of methods, techniques, and services that contribute to "reproductive health and well-being of young people by preventing and solving reproductive health-related problems."

9. It appears, then, the bills' proposed simple solution is to encourage the use of contraceptives among adolescents, without considering that by doing this, the State is also necessarily encouraging sexual behavior among adolescents.

10. 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.

11. ALFI believes that the more holistic and integral solution should be about forming first and foremost the person's inner value system, and NOT adolescents exercising their so-called sexual rights and pursuing reproductive health at a young age and outside the context of marriage and family life.

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

I. On Declaration of Policy

- a. The underlying purpose of the law should NOT be 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 should be **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 should NOT be about providing information on how to have "SAFE SEX" It should be about **helping teens understand the role and proper use of their reproductive gifts beyond a mere expression of sexual rights.**
- c. The purpose should NOT be to provide universal access to reproductive health care services to prevent unintended pregnancy. It should be about **educating their decision-making skills so that they avoid risky, irresponsible behaviors that can pose life-long consequences.**

II. 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, and desires according to a higher order of human values.

III. 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 are 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 should be **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 these are 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.

IV. 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 can claim to have 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 the programs and services involving and affecting children and their families.

13. 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 the bills, 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*³ of the youth.

14. 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.

³ Section 13, Article II, 1987 Philippine Constitution