

Reception in Honor of the D.C.
Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Washington, DC

2/23/00

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

**Reception in Honor of the D.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

**Indian Treaty Room
Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, DC
February 23, 2000**

Thank you all. I am just so delighted that this day has come and that we have such a distinguished group of people who have already pledged themselves to the campaign. And I got my sticker and I've got to put my sticker on too because I want to be considered part of the campaign and make sure that everybody knows that this is a very broad-based effort.

I want to thank Eleanor Holmes-Norton for being with us. Eleanor has been long involved in all kinds of good causes here in the District. I think we are also joined by a couple of other people who I would like to recognize: D.C. City Councilwoman Sandy Allen, thank you. Joyce Ladner, who has taken on the responsibility of chairing this board. Vicky Sant, who is my friend and said she would do everything she could to see this day come about some time ago. All of you who are members of the D.C. campaign's board of directors, thank you for serving. Brenda Rhodes-Miller, the campaign's executive director. Virginia Fleming and Dr. Herbert Niles, who together chaired the original Mayor's committee that helped pave the way for this overall effort that is being announced today. I want to congratulate you. (Applause.)

I want to congratulate you and welcome you to the White House. And I'm delighted to welcome so many young people who are here today who are committed to their own futures and the future of other young Washington, D.C. residents. And this D.C. Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is exactly what is needed to bring greater attention and visibility to this issue and enlist more people into the cause. And I thank and congratulate our five awardees for what they do every day to transform the lives of this city's teenagers.

You know, we're meeting at a hopeful time in our effort to reduce teen pregnancy in all of our communities. America's teen pregnancy rates are the lowest on record. Now here in the District, the rate has fallen by more than 30 percent since 1993. Now that means that fewer teens are getting pregnant, fewer teens are giving birth, and fewer teens are having abortions. And those are all really good news stories for us. (Applause.)

And therefore it means that more teenagers are getting a chance at a future that they can really make for themselves. And many of you in this room are the reasons why these statistics are heading in the right direction. Because of you, teenagers aren't choosing names for their new babies, but they're choosing majors in college. Young girls who might've spent their days changing diapers are now cashing hard-earned paychecks. Young men who might've looked for trouble on the streets are now looking toward the future—changing life pieces to masterpieces. So on behalf of the families whose lives you've changed, I thank you for your inspiration and your hard work.

But we all know we have a lot more work ahead of us, because despite the fact that we have lower rates of pregnancy, of birth, and of abortions, there are still too many of all in those categories. There are still too many children having babies. We know that in some neighborhoods in this city, like every other city—and in fact, most rural areas around our country as well—the percentages of births to teenagers out of wedlock are increasing. So even though the overall rate is going down, the number of single moms in their teenage years is still a very serious problem. We also know that the combination of single motherhood and teenage years is a recipe for children growing up in poverty without proper healthcare, nutrition, or nurturing.

Five years ago in his State of the Union address, the President challenged parents and leaders across our country to create a national campaign to prevent teen pregnancy. We recognized that fighting teen pregnancy had to be a comprehensive, grassroots effort enlisting all sectors of our society and using all strategies, from abstinence to better healthcare to after-school programs. That's why what you're doing here today is so critical, because we're bringing together business leaders, clergy, educators, parents and young people themselves, to help more teens choose better alternatives to early parenthood. We can make sure that every young person in this city has the opportunity to attend a world-class school. We can make sure that teenagers have things to say "yes" to, whether it's playing on a soccer team or starring in a school play or planning to go to college. We can make sure that every young person can count on the unconditional love of a caring adult, instead of a crying baby at home.

I know from the work that I've done—for more than over thirty years—with young families, young moms and their babies, that it is one of the saddest experiences you can have when you watch a young mother coping with a crying baby. And what used to be a lot of fun—dressing up that infant—becomes, as we have all experienced, the hard work of parenting a toddler, which is, you know, a lot more difficult. And the stages of development then that a child goes through are not being responded to as that child needs because the young mother herself has not had that experience and can't therefore really respond effectively.

I know that we can meet the goal that you have set, of cutting the teen pregnancy rate in our nation's capital in half by the year 2005. You have recognized in your slogan that it's time to change the conversation about teen pregnancy here in our nation's capital, and I hope that's exactly what we do and that we enlist more teens in this conversation for themselves.

I'm very pleased with the work that's been done so far and the progress that has been made in the national campaign. One of the best pieces of news from our national campaign is the strides that have been made in the African-American teen pregnancy and birth rate. That represented a real outreach of people from the entire community, making sure that the message got through to young people.

Well, here in the District of Columbia and our nation's capital, we have to redouble our efforts. And I hope that we enlist every church, every community group, every school, every parents' group, every neighborhood group that we possibly can reach to get this conversation going. And that young people themselves understand that they have a great deal at stake in postponing early parenting and in working for their own dreams and the kind of future we want to make possible for all of our children.

So thank you, thank you, thank you. I look forward to more reports and information about your successes. And I know with the kind of people assembled here and the leadership of this campaign, we're going to see a lot of positive changes in the lives of the young people of this District.

Thank you all very much.

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