

Governor's veto threat blocked effort to reduce teen pregnancies

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Caught in the barrage of last-minute vetoed bills by Governor Paulenty in the recently concluded Minnesota State Legislative session was a measure that would have provided a comprehensive approach to addressing the growing teen pregnancy problem. Statistical data throughout the country indicate that the problem is rapidly becoming a burden on the social fabric of our communities, as well as on our collective economic welfare.

According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the public cost of teen childbearing runs to 9.1 billion taxpayer dollars annually. Further, according to this study, the U.S. has the highest teen pregnancy and birth rate in the industrialized world.

The study also shows that teen pregnancy among youngsters of color is the highest of all.

In view of these disturbing figures, the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, worked relentlessly during the past legislative session to develop a wide-ranging, comprehensive piece of legislation. Their bill focused on means of dealing with the problem at the school level, where youngsters are learning other means of developing more healthy lifestyles.

According to Lorie Alveshire, policy director of MOAPPP, this year's legislative results were especially disappointing. For eight years the organization has sponsored legislation of this nature, but with the House of Representatives in the hands of Republicans, the legislation was kept from even getting a hearing. Now that the more friendly Democrats have taken over, better results were anticipated.

According to Alveshire, things were moving along wonderfully at first. The bill was assigned to the Education Policy and Finance Committee, where it was passed and sent to the House floor. There it was passed and became a part of the Education Omnibus Bill.

It was there that the governor urged that it be removed; otherwise, he said it could jeopardize the education reform bill. In the last-minute legislative efforts to avoid the governor's threatened vetoes, legislators pulled the bill.

The supporters were disappointed, but not disheartened. They promised to reinforce their supporters and return again next session. They had nothing but praise for the legislators who stuck with them all the way.

The principle authors were Neva Walker in the House and Sandy Pappas in the Senate. Other legislative supporters included Mindy Greiling, Tarry Clark, Carlos Mariani, Kathy Tinglestad and Ron Erhardt.

Matthew Little welcomes reader responses to mlittle@spokesman-recorder.com