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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Study Gives State Senators First Look at Impact of Teen Births in Their Districts

BERKELEY, CA, March 13, 2003... As legislators struggle with a record state budget deficit, a study released today by the Public Health Institute (PHI) puts California's annual societal costs related to teen births at a staggering \$3.3 billion. In its analysis of teen birth costs and trends, the study, *No Time for Complacency – Teen Births in California*, offers state senators their first snapshot of the societal costs of teen births in their districts and unveils the growing challenge the state faces over the next five years.

“While we can be rightfully proud of California's reductions in teen birth rates, now is not the time for complacency,” says study co-author Dr. Norm Constantine, senior scientist and director of PHI's Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development. “Demographic and economic factors are coalescing to reverse this decade-long decline, demanding extraordinary efforts by California's leaders.”

The study took the unconventional tact of breaking down year 2000 teen birth rate figures by state senate districts to accentuate the local and political relevance of these numbers. While the rates of live births to teens by senate district range from a low of 17 per thousand (Senator Johnson's 35th District, Orange County) to the state high of 94.8 (Senator Florez's District 16, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Tulare), the authors point out that every one of California's 40 state senate districts had higher teen birth rates than Japan, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany and Ireland. In fact both the U.S. and California teen birth rates are higher than rates for any western democracy in the world.

“We can do better, and given the staggering emotional, societal and fiscal costs related to teen births, we have to,” insists study co-author Dr. Carmen Nevarez, PHI's medical director and vice president of external relations. “Any legislator or leader willing to settle for good enough is not only abandoning some of their most vulnerable constituents but also turning their back on tens and even hundreds of millions of dollars a year.”

Costs per district were calculated based on a comprehensive and rigorous series of cost analyses on teen pregnancy and parenting. Estimates of taxpayer costs (including lost tax revenue and public assistance costs) and total societal costs (also including lost income, productivity and medical costs) were determined based on the total teen birth rate in each senate district. The resulting numbers depict a substantial challenge for districts already struggling with major revenue losses and cutbacks, and force senators to look at the losses in their district, which range from \$27 million to \$192 million a year.

“When teacher, public health, police and firefighter jobs are on the line, legislators have to look under every stone for cost savings and revenue,” Nevarez said. “This is one big stone.”

Looking at California’s rising poverty rates (a strong predictor of teen birth rates) and growing teen population, the report expanded on the California Department of Finance’s projection of an imminent increase in teen births. Within five years, according to the authors, the annual number of teen births in California is projected to increase by a phenomenal 23 percent.

The study did offer some encouraging news, however. According to the report, California’s unprecedented investment in teen pregnancy prevention contributed to the largest decline in teen birth rates over the past decade of all 50 states. The study says that the 40 percent reduction in California’s annual teen birth rate since 1991 represents 35,000 fewer teen births each year and translates that to a total annual savings to society of \$2.2 billion. Ironically, those same programs are now on the cutting block as legislators struggle with a monstrous state budget deficit.

Equipped with an understanding of the impact of teen births on their communities, senators and elected officials should exercise leadership, the study says, and bring together parents, adolescents, and other school and community stakeholders to address this issue, search for local and statewide solutions, and support those programs that work.

“This study gives every legislator a definitive picture of the impact that teen pregnancies are having on their districts and their constituents,” said Assembly Majority Floor Leader Marco Antonio Firebaugh, Chair of the California Latino Legislative Caucus. “This is an issue that all legislators must continue to take seriously.”

The Public Health Institute is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting health, well-being and quality of life. The study, which was funded in part by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation, is available online at <http://crahd.phi.org/>.