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## Celebrate Declines in Teen Pregnancy

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One of the great national success stories of the past two decades has been the historic declines in teen pregnancy and childbearing. Nationally, the rates have plummeted by more than 50 percent.

Georgia's progress has been especially impressive. Since its peak in 1991, the teen birthrate in the Peach State has dropped 56 percent. That's impressive progress on an issue many once considered intractable.

The credit for this great good news goes to teens. The decisions they make are directly responsible for the stunning progress in reducing early pregnancy and childbearing. More teens are waiting to have sex; they are also reporting fewer sexual partners and using contraception more often.

Why have teens become more careful? Here are some major reasons:

- The continuing decrease in teen births over many years has probably contributed to a growing social norm that "teen pregnancy is not OK." This creates a virtuous circle of sorts, where progress feeds and fuels itself.
- More communities are using effective, research-based programs that change teens' behavior.
- Entertainment media has increased its attention to the risks and reality of teen pregnancy. Credible research suggests MTV's popular "16 and Pregnant" and "Teen Mom" reality programs have played a role in the progress.
- There has also been substantial action on this issue at the national, state and local level, including the long-standing, effective leadership of the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Power and Potential.

Here's the catch, though: Despite impressive progress, 3 in 10 U.S. girls get pregnant by age 20. Many racial/ethnic groups have higher than average rates. The U.S. still leads the developed world in teen birth rates.

The personal costs often associated with teens having children are well known and well documented. For example, just 38 percent of teen girls who have a child before age 18 earn a high school diploma.

The public costs of teen childbearing are not well known. New data released by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy show that, in Georgia, teen childbearing cost taxpayers at least \$395 million in 2010 alone; for the nation overall, the costs were \$9.4 billion. There were 351,013 teen births in Georgia between 1991 and 2010, costing taxpayers \$10.3 billion.

It is important to add that the progress Georgia has made in reducing teen pregnancy has also resulted in real cost savings. Had Georgia's teen birth rate not declined so steeply between 1991 and 2010, state taxpayers would have shouldered an even greater burden — about \$492 million more in 2010 alone.

Fewer teen pregnancies mean higher levels of educational attainment, stronger and healthier families, a higher-quality workforce and greater savings for taxpayers, all compelling reasons to continue investing in prevention.

Celebrate "Peach Progress." Keep working on this critical issue.