



Issue Brief

The Housing Crisis: Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Illinois

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Thousands of pregnant and parenting youth in Illinois are living in unsafe and unstable conditions with their children, and there is not enough housing available to those who are in need of alternative living arrangements.

Illinois should address this need by increasing state funding and seeking additional federal funds for programs that serve pregnant and parenting youth in need of alternative housing. Additionally, the Department of Human Services should maintain an updated list of available housing programs.

Thousands of pregnant and parenting youth are living in unsafe housing conditions and are in need of alternative living arrangements.

- In 2002, there were 18,546 births to women under the age of 20 in Illinois.ⁱ
- A statewide survey of social service providers conducted by the Center for Impact Research (CIR) found that 26% of pregnant or parenting youth age 21 and under are living in unsafe or unstable conditions.ⁱⁱ
- In the CIR survey, 61% of pregnant and parent youth living in unsafe or unstable conditions were in need of immediate alternatives to their current living arrangements.

Reasons for needing alternative living arrangements ranged from the lack of a permanent place to stay to financial, physical, sexual or emotional abuse of the young parent and his or her child.

- 31% of those needing alternative living arrangements were either transient or living in a shelter or car and 46% were living with their families.

Most commonly, youth did not have access to appropriate housing because of a lack of sufficient income, lack of available affordable housing, lack of available long-term supportive housing, limited availability or a lack of transitional living programs and the youth's lack of credit.

Alternative housing options for young parents are few and far between.

Pregnant and parenting youth under age 18 who are not wards of the State of Illinois have the fewest options.

Until recently, community organizations in Illinois could not obtain a license to provide transitional housing for minors who were not wards of the state for more than 120 days. HB 0556, which passed in Illinois in 2003, allows community organizations to be licensed by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to provide housing for more than 120 days to youth ages 16 and 17. Under the new law, 16- and 17-year-olds may also go through a court process that will allow them to live in transitional housing when they cannot get their parent's consent.

Only one youth shelter in Chicago, The Night Ministry's Open Door Youth Shelter, houses parenting minors who are not wards of the state. It has a total of only 16 beds and 5 cribs for infants. The beds are not specifically reserved for pregnant and parenting minors, who must be turned away on a regular basis due to a lack of space. There is a similar situation in the Chicago suburbs and the rest of Illinois, with approximately 100 living spaces for this population known to be available in the entire state.

Pregnant and parenting youth ages 18 and over also have limited options.

There are approximately 50 spaces for youth ages 18 and over in Chicago and 160 spaces for youth in other parts of the state, available through community organizations. They are a mix of shelter and apartment spaces. Some do not accept youth who have more than one child, and most reported that they had to turn away youth due to lack of space.ⁱⁱⁱ

Illinois must fund housing for pregnant and parenting youth through state and federal funding sources.

Some states are using state and federal funding to provide housing for pregnant or parenting youth. Over 100 teen parent housing programs, including those in large shared single-family homes and clusters of apartments, operated nationwide in 2001. Six states – Georgia, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Texas – operate networks of housing for pregnant or parenting youth. In these statewide networks, states pay some or all of the costs of the program, refer youth to homes, and set guidelines for the programs. States provide contracts to non-profit organizations to operate the homes. Results from these projects have shown that young mothers have fewer repeat pregnancies, healthier babies, better high school/GED completion rates and stronger life skills.^{iv}

Potential federal funding sources include the Social Services Block Grant, Community Development Block Grant, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Supportive Housing Funds, the federal Department of Health and Human Services Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant, and the HUD Good Neighbor Program. The Illinois Housing Development Authority should allot state and federal housing dollars toward housing for pregnant and parenting youth.

Illinois must continue to increase the state budget line item for homeless youth and designate part of this funding for pregnant and parenting youth.

The Illinois legislature approved an increase of \$500,000 in state funding for programs serving homeless youth in 2003, bringing the total allocated state funding from \$4.3 million to \$4.8 million in fiscal year 2004. In February 2004, the Governor maintained the \$4.8 million in his fiscal year 2005 budget proposal, which would allow for the \$500,000 to be spent on expanding the number of youth who are housed on an annual basis.^v

The previous \$4.3 million in funds for programs that serve homeless youth have supported 22 programs throughout the state. In the fiscal year preceding June 2003, the programs provided emergency or transitional housing for 619 youth, 121 of whom were pregnant or parenting. According to a 2001 survey of providers, 42% of youth seeking shelter were turned away due to lack of resources.^{vi} Increasing the budget line item for homeless youth services to \$4.8 million was a good start, and the state should continue to increase this allocation in order to meet the needs of homeless youth and designate a significant portion of it for organizations that provide housing services for pregnant and parenting youth.

The Illinois Department of Human Services must establish a comprehensive system to educate pregnant and parenting youth about available supportive services and housing programs.

Service providers for pregnant and parenting youth, and young parents themselves, are largely unaware of the limited housing services available, yet they consistently have a need to find housing. The “Help Me Grow” hotline (1-800-323-GROW) currently provides referral services for pregnant and parenting youth. However, service providers report that housing is not a major component of the hotline and that operators are unfamiliar with Chicago neighborhoods.

The Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health’s (ICAH) mission is to promote a positive approach to adolescent sexual health and comprehensive support for young parents. ICAH promotes policies that ensure that youth have access to the information, services, and support they need to make healthy decisions. For more information on housing for pregnant and parenting youth in Illinois, or to take advantage of opportunities to get involved in advocacy on behalf of Illinois young people, visit www.icaah.org.

ⁱ “Illinois Teen Births by County, 2002.” Illinois Department of Public Health. www.idph.state.il.us

ⁱⁱ Marcy, H. “No Place to Grow: The Unsafe and Unstable Housing Conditions of Illinois Pregnant and Parenting Youth and Their Children.” Center for Impact Research: June 2003. www.impactresearch.org (Less than 1% of the youth served in the organizations that responded to the survey were in foster care.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Sylvester, K. and Reich, K. “Second Chance Homes: Advice for the States.” Social Policy Action Network: 1999. www.span-online.org

^v Illinois State Budget Book, Fiscal Year 2005, Pages 3-20, Homeless Youth Services line item www.state.il.us/budget

^{vi} “Youth on the Streets and on Their Own: Youth Homelessness in Illinois.” Chicago Coalition for the Homeless: 2001. www.chicagohomeless.org