

Nebraska State Legislature

SENATOR GWEN HOWARD

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COMMITTEES

Education
Health and Human Services

February 12, 2010

Senator Ben Nelson
720 Hart Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Nelson,

I am pleased to write a letter in support of VNA's request to fund their home visitation. Home Visitation is a proven strategy in working to prevent child abuse, maltreatment, and neglect. The VNA home visitation program supports young mothers, families, and their infants. Often these young mothers do not have a positive support system, and by providing support, the VNA hopes to not only prevent child abuse and neglect, but support young mothers to complete their education.

According to the February 2001 Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, adolescent parents and their children represent populations at increased risk for medical, psychological, developmental, and social problems. Younger adolescent mothers are more likely to be single parents and to receive no prenatal care, or care only during the third trimester. These mothers are also less likely to finish high school. Developmentally immature adolescent mothers may put more time and energy into their relationships with partners than with their children and have less knowledge about child development and appropriate parenting practices, increasing the risk of child neglect or abuse. Teen parents have their own developmental needs that compete with the newborn infant's developmental needs, complicating an already stressful situation and may increase the propensity for child abuse.

Additionally, teen mothers have lower high school diploma attainment than those who did not have a teen birth. According to childtrends.org, almost nine in 10 (89%) of young women who had not given birth as a teen earned a high school diploma before age 22. In comparison, approximately five in 10 (51%) of teen mothers earned a high school diploma before the age of 22.

Keeping pregnant and parenting teens in school is critical to reducing intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. I hope you will support the efforts of the Visiting Nurses Association to undertake this project in Omaha.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gwen Howard". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Senator Gwen Howard
Nebraska Legislature – District 9