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March 8, 2018

Hon. Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). I look forward to working with you, and would like to take this opportunity to request clarification on an issue that originated under your predecessor.

It has been brought to my attention that HHS announced it would cancel grants for 81 grantees that have been receiving funding through the Office of Adolescent Health's (OAH) Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program. These grantees were in the process of conducting five-year research projects, and as a result of HHS' decision, they will not be able to complete their work.

In response to a previous Congressional inquiry on this matter, when asked for the justification behind this decision, HHS indicated that these projects were terminated because "of the 37 funded and evaluated projects, 73 percent either had no impact or had a negative impact on teen behavior." It is my understanding that this assessment does not align with the findings of a peer-reviewed analysis of these programs, which determined that there were in fact a total of 41 evaluations that were previously carried out under the TPP Program. Of these programs, 12 showed positive results (29%), 13 showed no impact (32%), 13 were inconclusive (32%), and 3 (7%) showed negative impact.^{1,2,3}

Given this conflicting information between the review's findings and your agency's previous response, I would request that you provide an explanation of this discrepancy and how your agency conducted its review of the TPP Program results.

Additionally, I would also request that you provide the specific regulatory or policy authority that HHS utilized in its decision to not award funds for the continuation of these program.

In a related matter, HHS announced in November 2017 that it was initiating a "new research and evaluation collaboration to support and improve teen pregnancy prevention and sexual risk avoidance

¹ <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303367>

² <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/evaluation/grantee-led-evaluation/summary-ebps.pdf>

³ <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/sites/default/files/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/evaluation/grantee-led-evaluation/summary-researchdemonstration.pdf>

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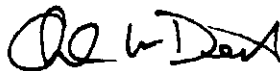
programs,” and that this effort would be “funded from a variety of sources including available funds set aside for support and evaluation within the HHS Office of Adolescent Health.” Can you please detail for me the funding sources that are being used for this effort? Furthermore, will this new initiative be subject to the same reviews that have been used for previous TPP Programs?

As you may know, in 2016 Congress enacted the Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Act with overwhelming bipartisan support. In issuing the report required by this legislation, the Commission stated that “policymakers must have good information on which to base their decisions,” but that “too little evidence is produced to meet this need.” This report specifically identified the TPP Program as a program that had developed a rigorous portfolio of evidence. I have long been a supporter of evidence-based policymaking and decisions, and I take the Commission’s findings very seriously.

For these reasons, I am concerned about HHS’ decision to terminate the TPP grants and how this might undermine the government’s ability to cultivate scientific evidence. Not only does cutting these five year programs short deprive us the opportunity to learn their results, but I am concerned about the precedent this may set for HHS’ future decisions.

I appreciate your attention to this request. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact my staff member Bryce Mongeon at 202-225-6411 or Bryce.Mongeon@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Charles W. Dent
Member of Congress