

# BEYOND THE BELTWAY



## State Policies to Educate College Students about Unplanned Pregnancy

August 2018

As states seek to reduce high rates of unplanned pregnancy among older teens and young adults, one innovative bi-partisan strategy they have pursued is to provide relevant information for college students. Helping students prevent unplanned pregnancy also aligns with higher education efforts to improve college completion, especially at community colleges.

### Mississippi and Arkansas Lead the Way

Motivated by a desire to reduce historically high rates of teen pregnancy—and recognizing that approximately seven in 10 teen pregnancies and births are to 18- and 19-year-olds—in 2014 Mississippi was the first state to enact legislation to educate college students about preventing unplanned pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> This also supported goals of improving college completion, workforce preparation, and economic development. Similar statistics and an interest in [college retention](#) prompted a bi-partisan group of Arkansas legislators to introduce a similar bill to address unplanned pregnancy among college students in that state in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Judging from the [reaction](#) of college students in Arkansas, reliable and relevant information about sex, pregnancy prevention, and birth control is both needed and appreciated in college, especially since many students did not receive such information in high school or at home. These bi-partisan laws direct state higher education entities to work with public universities and community colleges to develop action plans to address the issue. As [NPR](#) reported, both bills “had bi-partisan support and were amazingly uncontroversial.”

One major difference between the laws in Mississippi and Arkansas is that the former was able to fund community colleges to implement the plans they had developed. The legislature appropriated a total of \$250,000 for the 2015-2016 academic year, with grants between \$7,000 and \$40,000 allocated to colleges depending on their size. The governor and the community colleges requested an increase in funding in the following year, but funding was not appropriated due to budget constraints. However, the state allocated \$250,000 in available Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to support continued activities in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Although funding is beneficial, colleges can begin to address unplanned pregnancy using free or low cost resources, such as online lessons and other materials available through Power to Decide.<sup>4</sup> In Arkansas, the non-profit [Arkansas Campaign to Prevent Unplanned Pregnancy](#), was created to raise funding and promote communication in support of the effort.

## Implementation

Both Mississippi and Arkansas formed work groups composed of representatives from state higher education agencies, community colleges and public universities, health departments, and other stakeholders. As they developed their plans, the work groups learned about unplanned pregnancy, reviewed relevant data and resources, did a survey of what colleges already offered when it comes to education about unplanned pregnancy and access to health services, and identified a menu of strategies colleges could pursue. For example, see Arkansas' plan [here](#).

## Other States Take Notice

Other states in the region are taking note, as Texas and Tennessee considered similar legislation in 2017.<sup>5,6</sup> The Tennessee bill passed the Senate with unanimous and bi-partisan support, but was held up in a House committee. The Texas House and Senate held hearings about the bill, which started an important conversation. In addition, polling in Texas found strong [public support](#), with 85% of respondents favoring initiatives and programs that provide college students in Texas with information about ways to best avoid unplanned pregnancies. In addition, Louisiana passed a narrower bill in 2017, championed by a legislator who works in higher education and has seen how unplanned pregnancy affects student success.<sup>7</sup>

The groundbreaking actions of these early states demonstrate the potential for bi-partisan action to address unplanned pregnancy among college students. Empowering more college students in additional states with information that gives them the power to decide if, when, and under what circumstances to get pregnant (or for students who are already parents, to have additional children) will contribute to advancing educational and economic opportunity.

## Resources

- [Student \(Sex\) Life](#) is Power to Decide's one-stop site for colleges, with links to resources for college students, faculty/administrators, and health care providers on or working with college campuses. This includes [online lessons](#) that will help students prevent unplanned pregnancy and improve sexual health. Lessons have been evaluated and shown to improve students' knowledge and behavioral intent.
- Power to Decide's Campus Sexual Health Program helps colleges address three different aspects of sexual health: sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unplanned pregnancy. The goal is to advance strategies that are sustainable, scalable, systemic, customizable, relevant, adaptable, and measurable. The [framework](#) provides a roadmap for the services, programs, policies and practices that colleges can implement to better support their students on these issues and, in turn, promote student retention and completion. For more information, contact JeNeen Anderson, Senior Manager of Programs at [janderson@powertodecide.org](mailto:janderson@powertodecide.org). Power to Decide is also available to

provide policy or program [consultation](#) for states interested in receiving individualized technical assistance.

- [Helping Mississippi College Students Prevent Unplanned Pregnancy and STIs](#) links to a short [video](#) featuring Mississippi college student sharing why it's important that colleges provide education about sexual health and to a [case study](#) about what four colleges in Mississippi did to improve connections to healthcare services in the community so students know where to go to get birth control and other sexual health services.
- [Webinar Recap: Five Ways Colleges are Addressing Unplanned Pregnancy On Their Campuses](#). In Fall 2017, Power to Decide hosted a webinar highlighting experiences of state like Mississippi and Arkansas and featuring leaders from both states.
- National Conference of State Legislatures [brief](#) describes bi-partisan efforts in Arkansas and Mississippi.
- [Pew's Stateline](#) highlights implementation of Mississippi's bill and perspectives from leaders in Arkansas and Mississippi about how addressing unplanned pregnancy supports college completion goals. [Local news](#) covers Arkansas' initiative.
- Women's Foundation of Mississippi online guide [Addressing Unplanned Pregnancy Prevention among College Students: A Guide for Mississippi Colleges](#).
- [Media Aware](#) is an evidence-based, online program that leverages college students' passion for pop culture to teach medically-accurate sexual health information and behavioral skills to reduce unplanned pregnancy, STIs, and sexual assault.
- For information about other state policies to improve information about and access to contraception, please see Power to Decide's [State Policy](#) resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Mississippi Senate SB 2563. (2014). Retrieved from <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2014/pdf/SB/2500-2599/SB2563SG.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Arkansas House HB 1534 (2015). Retrieved from [www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2015/2015R/Bills/HB1534.pdf](http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2015/2015R/Bills/HB1534.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> The Department of Human Services provided \$250,000 in TANF funds through an MOU with the Mississippi Community College Board to allocate to community colleges in 2017. While funding didn't continue for 2018, some colleges are continuing their activities.

<sup>4</sup> Bedsider.org. Student Sex Life, includes online lessons for college students. Retrieved from [www.bedsider.org/studentsexlife](http://www.bedsider.org/studentsexlife).

<sup>5</sup> Tennessee Senate SB 521 (2017). Retrieved from <http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=SB0521&GA=110>.

<sup>6</sup> Texas Senate SB 2109 (2017). [www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=85R&Bill=SB2109](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=85R&Bill=SB2109).

<sup>7</sup> See <http://kpel965.com/universities-could-be-required-to-make-plan-to-prevent-unplanned-pregnancy/>.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the final bill, Louisiana Senate SB 106 (2017) restricts information about and referrals to certain providers. Retrieved from [www.legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1052203](http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1052203).