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November 19, 2003

Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman, Government Reform Committee
2348 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Henry Waxman
Ranking Member, Government Reform Committee
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Davis and Waxman,

On behalf of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, I write to express our serious concern that numerous scientists funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) examining sex and risky behavior have been singled out by Congress for further review because of the very nature of their work. As an organization, the National Campaign strongly believes in the importance of continued federal government support of top-flight research in this area, and we are especially supportive of the quality of the NIH peer-review grant award process. The fact that NIH has one of the most, if not the most, rigorous and respected peer review systems in the world helps to assure that ideology does *not* interfere with science or filter what science is conducted. We ask that you and your colleagues continue to do all you can to make sure that that NIH is allowed to continue to do its important work in the service of public health, free from ideological interference.

Since its inception, the National Campaign has placed a high premium on the importance of getting the facts straight. We rely extensively on quality research to inform everything we do. This emphasis on research derives from two key factors: (1) our view that new research-based knowledge about adolescent development and sexual behavior gives important clues about what can be done to reduce teen pregnancy, and (2) the simple fact that when working in a field as ideologically charged and contentious as reducing teen pregnancy, being firmly grounded in science can help in dealing constructively and calmly with differing points of view.

These core beliefs explain why we feel so strongly that NIH must continue to fund research examining such important issues as the patterns of sexual behavior and drug use among

adolescents, the sexual behavior of younger adolescents, and the effectiveness of public service announcements. We readily acknowledge that some of these areas of inquiry are quite sensitive. However, given this nation's continued high rates of teen sexual activity, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, we also recognize the critical need for continued quality science on these issues.

The National Campaign is a major "consumer" of available data and research concerning adolescent sexual behavior. Even so, we are constantly struck by how *little* is known about this area. For example, in May 2003, the National Campaign released the report, *14 and Younger: The Sexual Behavior of Young Adolescents*. The report's primary finding — that one in five adolescents has sex before age 15 — stirred up deep interest among parents, the media, and those who work with young people, partly because this was real news and filled a large void in American's understanding of this vulnerable group of young people. In our view, this example underscores the critical need to ask difficult questions, even when the topic of inquiry is quite sensitive, such as the sexual behavior of very young adolescents. Absent such information, we are all limited in our ability to provide sound guidance and advice — not only about preventing teen pregnancy — but about sex, love, and relationships more generally.

Thank you for your interest in maintaining a strong U.S. research program that is willing to address important, sensitive issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Sarah S. Brown
Director

Cc: HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson