

1. Policy Position

Support of the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality

BACKGROUND

The Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality (Project) was established as a joint initiative of the Southern Governors' Association and the Southern Legislative Conference in 1984. The Project was created out of the need to provide states with research and policy analyses on the contributing factors to infant mortality and recommend strategies to address these problems. For more than a decade, the Project has supported states' information needs by functioning as a clearinghouse and by providing them with data and strategies for preventing infant mortality, low birthweight and adolescent pregnancy and childbearing. This is accomplished by generating and broadly disseminating major policy reports, issues briefs, newsletters, fact sheets, and by convening state and regional briefings and seminars. Indeed, our message over the years has been "let's ensure access to health education and services for women and their families so that babies are born healthier and states can reduce costs."

The Project is largely grant-funded and staffed by a director, two policy analysts, a research assistant, a graduate student intern and a program assistant. The majority of funding comes from private foundations, corporations and the federal government. The Southern Legislative Conference has contributed \$25,000 per year for the past four years (\$100,000) and the Southern Governors' Association has contributed \$25,000 per year for the past three years (\$75,000). The Project also receives some revenue from the sale of its publications.

The Project's work continues to be important because although the infant mortality rate has declined over the years, the low birthweight rate and the out-of-wedlock teen childbearing rate has increased. This means that more babies are being born smaller and sicker, resulting in enormous health and welfare costs for states. Future efforts will focus on providing concise and relevant information to state policy leaders on Medicaid and welfare reform plans and their prospective impact on maternal and infant health, and on continuing to identify and share innovative approaches to preventing infant mortality, low birthweight and adolescent childbearing in the South.

The Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality supports the work of governors, state legislators and their staffs in their efforts to improve maternal and child health and reduce infant mortality in the South.

RECOMMENDATION

In recognition of the continuing need to address the problem of infant mortality and low birthweight births in the South, the Southern Legislative Conference of The Council of State Governments recommends the continued support of the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality in the following ways:

- ▶ support the existence of the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality and to direct the Project to continue its mission to support governors, legislators and their staffs in their efforts to improve maternal and child health and reduce infant mortality in the South;

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- ▶ direct the Advisory Board of the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality to continue to advise and guide the work of the Project; and
- ▶ provide continued financial support to the Project in support of its work, for the 1996-1997 fiscal year, in the amount of \$20,000.

Adopted by the Southern Legislative Conference, Nashville, Tennessee, August 12, 1996.