

## 6. POLICY POSITION

### FINANCIAL COMMITMENT TO THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL PROJECT ON INFANT MORTALITY

#### BACKGROUND

In 1984, in recognition of the high incidence of infant mortality in the South, the Southern Legislative Conference joined with the Southern Governors' Association to establish the Southern Regional Infant Mortality Task Force. Since 1984, the Task Force and its successor, the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality, have worked in four primary areas:

- o to document the scope of infant mortality and factors related to its prevalence throughout the South;
- o to raise the level of public awareness of the problem;
- o to monitor the progress of individual southern states in reducing their infant mortality and low birthweight rates; and
- o to highlight and transfer ideas and experiences of successful state programs, with a view toward the development of regional prototypes.

Since the Project was established, the infant mortality rate has decreased by 10 percent in the region and the number of programs implemented in the states to address this problem has more than tripled (See Appendix I for additional information on accomplishments). But even with this progress, forty-four babies below age one die every day in the South before celebrating their first birthday, and more than 100,000 babies are born each year in the South at a life threatening low birthweight (See Appendix II for additional information on need).

#### Summary of Financial Status

The Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality is funded entirely through grants and has been since its inception in 1984. No portion of the dues paid to the Southern Governors' Association or to the Southern Legislative Conference goes toward the salaries, operating expenses or special initiatives of the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality. Recognizing this fact, the South's Advisory Board on Infant Mortality, the entity formally supported by SGA in 1990 and SLC in 1991, recommended at their April, 1992 Board meeting that some financial support from both of the Project's parent organizations be considered.

In order to operate, the Project solicits funds from private and public funding sources. Currently the Project is operating with funds from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Healthy Start Foundation of North Carolina, Pew Charitable Trusts of Pennsylvania and the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. This is in addition to funds that the Project raises through the sale of its publications. Project staff spend approximately 35 percent of their time raising funds in order to remain operable. This diminishes significantly the amount of time devoted to its primary purpose. The Project typically only has funds to pay all expenses for a six to eight month period.

## RECOMMENDATION

In light of the continuing need to address the problem of infant mortality and low birthweight births in the South and in recognition of the impact that the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality has had in addressing these problems, the Southern Legislative Conference:

- o expresses its ongoing commitment to the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality. The Project will stand as a permanent part of the Southern Legislative Conference until the South achieves all of the maternal and child health goals set by the U. S. Surgeon General. Currently goals are in place for the year 2000. In 2001, the Southern Legislative Conference will assess the South's status relative to the goals and determine the continued need for the Project's existence;
- o directs the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality to continue the efforts to document the scope of infant mortality and factors related to its prevalence throughout the South; to raise the level of public awareness of the problem; to monitor the progress of individual southern states in reducing their infant mortality and low birthweight rates; and, to highlight and transfer ideas and experiences of successful state programs, with a view toward the development of regional prototypes;
- o directs the Southern Regional Project on Infant Mortality to continue to provide state legislators with issue briefs, to develop and disseminate model legislation to SLC members and their colleagues; and to convene legislative briefing sessions to examine the most effective and fiscally responsible programs, policies and laws to address the infant mortality and low birthweight problems of states;
- o directs the South's Advisory Board on Infant Mortality, the entity co-chaired by SGA's Lead Governor and SLC's Lead Legislator, to guide the Project's work and endorses their current recommendation that for the next two years, the Project would focus on:

Health care financing -- The Project will work to ensure that all pregnant and postpartum women and children have financial access to health care.

Developing a system of care -- The Project will work with states and communities to improve access to care for high risk populations, such as adolescents, low-income women, and the uninsured.

Prevention -- The Project will work on initiatives designed to promote planning for pregnancy and entering pregnancy healthy for all age groups, with a special emphasis on services and education for teenagers and high risk women.

- o in recognition of the need for the Project, agrees to provide the Project with \$25,000 toward its 1992-1993 expenses; and expresses its desire that the Southern Governors' Association likewise appropriate the same amount toward our joint initiative; and
- o agrees to examine, on an annual basis, the Project's need for support and SLC's ability to provide such support. It is the intent of the SLC to make an annual financial commitment toward the work of the Project.

Adopted by the Southern Legislative Conference, August 11, 1992, Miami Beach, Florida.

Sponsored by: Senator T. D. "Ted" Little, Alabama

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