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Emphasize education, prevention

By Mary Capobianco

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I'd like to thank you for your Jan. 22 abortion editorial ("ISSUE: Many teens are using the courts to get abortions without telling their parents.")

Planned Parenthood has been in the forefront of dealing with this issue, which needs more media attention. On Sunday, our Planned Parenthood affiliate covering South Palm Beach and Broward counties celebrated a 30-year anniversary, founded by a few women concerned about the rising teen pregnancy rate in both counties.

Based on three decades in the field, we can weigh in with our research and experience about teen abortion and parental notification.

About 61 percent of teens who become pregnant do voluntarily notify their parents (source: Henshaw and Kost study). Many of them come to Planned Parenthood with a parent. The majority of those who do not notify parents have a history of abuse and violence in their homes.

Alternatively, as in the celebrated case of Becky Bell, a pregnant model student doesn't want to fail her devoted parents. Becky went into a back alley and died there trying to abort.

Her parents have since fought for a minor's right to privacy because if their daughter were not required by law to notify them, she would be alive today after opting for a safe abortion.

So resorting to the back alley is a reality for teens from both very bad and very good homes.

It's no surprise that the parental notification law isn't reducing the number of teenage abortions. That's because the law is unrelated to the problem of teen pregnancy. Same with judicial waiver.

Surely state Rep. John Stargel, R-Lakeland, who is drafting legislation that would tighten the screws or eliminate judicial waivers, is aware that what he's trying to do is irrelevant to preventing teenage abortions. Tightening or eliminating judicial waivers or requiring parental notification only serve to eliminate safe options for teens already in a crisis pregnancy.

Your bottom line conclusion was right on: "Tinker with the law if you dare, but prevention is a far better route." For 30 years, our Planned Parenthood affiliate has advocated prevention and has established effective prevention programs set in place at our four health centers and teen after-school programs.

Education about prevention, protection and privacy is the antidote to abortion. If the state wants

to reduce teen pregnancy and teen abortion, it also needs to endorse comprehensive sex ed classes (which include abstinence education) in schools, rather than abstinence-only programs that are a proven failure, and thinly veiled religious indoctrination.

Bottom line: If you want to prevent abortion, adopt the tenets of Planned Parenthood. Draw on our organization's experience and research into prevention that we gladly share. Celebrate three decades of success in this community with us!

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