



WomanView

Volume 12, Issue 4

October 30, 2008

Ensuring Success in School Task Force to Hold Next Public Hearing in Chicago

Students who are parents, expectant parents, or survivors of domestic or sexual violence often face unique and complex challenges when dealing with the issues that arise from their circumstances and attempting to perform well at school and complete their education. The Ensuring Success in School Task Force was created specifically to address these issues in Illinois. Comprising legislators, advocates, educators, social workers, and students and their parents, the task force aims to develop policies, procedures, and protocols for school districts to meet the educational and related needs of elementary and secondary students who are parents, expectant parents, or survivors of domestic or sexual violence. A result of the [Ensuring Success in School Act \(ESSA\)](#) legislation drafted by the [Shriver Center](#) and its coalition partners, the task force ensures such students' ability to stay in school, stay safe while in school, and complete their education.

In order to understand the issues better and to gain perspective, the task force has been conducting public hearings around the state. Educators, advocates, students, parents of students, and other interested parties can testify about their experiences—good and bad—and what changes are necessary to surmount the students' barriers in dealing with pregnancy or parenting or the violence in their lives and continuing their education. What helps students and what hurts them in their efforts to stay in school and perform well? Hearings have been held in Quincy, Elgin, Springfield, and Mt. Vernon. The next hearing is scheduled in Chicago on December 8 from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (exactly where is yet to be announced).

Task force members have been hearing firsthand accounts of the barriers and opportunities that students, their families, school personnel, and advocates face when trying to work with their local school district and school personnel. For instance, one student who was sexually assaulted by a fellow student testified about her negative experience with school administrators and their refusal to take any steps to stop the harassment by her perpetrator's friends. Others testified how sensitive school administrators intervened to stop the harassment or to change class schedules so that survivors did not have to see their perpetrators regularly. Testimony from a school nurse related simple yet effective ways to help pregnant students remain in school, such as supplying pregnant students with crackers and 7-Up to combat nausea. This enabled the students to remain in school for the day instead of leaving and missing a whole day. The number of pregnant students who completed the school year in the nurse's high school rose from two out of sixteen in 2006 to sixteen out of nineteen in 2007. Thus accommodating the needs of pregnant students can help them overcome the barriers that keep them from completing their education.

For the Chicago hearing, the task force is seeking similar testimony from students who are parents, expectant parents, or survivors of domestic or sexual violence, the parents of these students, advocates, school personnel, or other interested parties. If you or someone you know is interested in testifying at the Chicago public hearing or in submitting written testimony, or would like more information on the task force, please contact [Wendy Pollack](#), director, Women's Law & Policy Project, Shriver Center, at wendypollack@povertylaw.org or 312.263.3830 ext. 238. The Shriver Center is sensitive to the need for confidentiality by some who would like to have input into the task force findings and recommendations. Contact Wendy Pollack to discuss further ways to give testimony or other input without revealing any identifying information.

To the Illinois General Assembly the task force will draft a report (to be completed in early 2009) detailing the task force's findings, recommendations, and model policies, procedures, and protocols to be implemented in school districts throughout Illinois. For information on the [Ensuring Success in School Act](http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=095-0558) (<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=095-0558>) and other documents pertaining to the law, visit the [Women's Law & Policy Project's webpage](http://www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/women-and-family) at <http://www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/women-and-family>.

Published by the SARGENT SHRIVER NATIONAL CENTER ON POVERTY LAW. Funded in part by generous grants from the Chicago Foundation for Women and the Jo & Art Moore Family Fund.