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Setting the record straight on minors' health care rights.

Seattle, WA – March 25, 2010 –

Yesterday, local media in Seattle reported a story about a mother angry that her teenage daughter obtained an abortion without the mother's knowledge or consent. Her daughter was apparently referred for the abortion through a health clinic located in, but not operated by, her daughter's public high school.

Legal Voice is disappointed that the media reported on this story without investigating the law protecting minors' rights in this state. Whether or not this mother was upset about it, her daughter, like all other minors in Washington State, has the legal right to obtain reproductive health services – including prenatal care, abortion, and birth control – with or without her parents' knowledge or consent.

This is not just the law – it is good policy. Research shows that the majority of young women do involve their parents or other trusted adults in their decision when they face an unintended pregnancy. There are very important reasons that the others do not. Young women who come from abusive homes, or are homeless or otherwise on their own, need the right to obtain reproductive health care, including prenatal care or abortion, without the fear, delay, and potential violence they would face if they were required to notify or get consent from a parent. All the major medical associations, including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American College of Physicians, agree that, while medical providers have an obligation to encourage young women to talk to their parents, no young woman should be forced to notify or get permission from her parents for this critical life decision, no matter what she decides.

Thankfully, the majority of families make these decisions together. Legal Voice will not speculate on why the young woman in Ballard did not involve her parents. But the school, the clinic, and the young girl were all within their legal rights to do what they did.

Legal Voice is a women's rights non-profit organization that pursues justice for all women and girls in the Northwest, through ground-breaking litigation, legislative advocacy, and educational tools to help individuals understand their rights. To learn more, visit LegalVoice.org.

All statistics from Cynthia Daillard *et al*., "Teenagers' Access to Confidential Reproductive Health Services," Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, Vol. 8., No. 4 (2005), available at http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/tgr/08/4/gr080406.html

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