

1. Your name and district number:

Elizabeth Thomson HD 24

2. The overall goals of welfare reform are to move people from welfare to work, reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy and encourage healthy marriages and family formation. TANF allows funds to be spent for marriage and couple relationship education, responsible fatherhood programs, financial education, and parenting programs. What benefits do you see for allocating 1-2% of the TANF budget in New Mexico for services to strengthen families?

The above ideas would be a start. There also needs to be education provided as to the alternatives to teen pregnancy. The culture of NM is frequently that it is OK and even desirable to become a parent while still a teen. Changing this will take time and effort, but must be undertaken if there is to be a long term solution. Access to biological sex education and safe birth control options must be part of the solution.

3. Research has consistently shown that the social, educational, health and economic outcomes of children in healthy, two-parent families are better than those living in single-parent households. New Mexico has among the highest rates in the nation for teen pregnancies, school drop-outs, juvenile crimes and women and children living in poverty. New Mexico spends \$225 million every year dealing with the outcomes of families in crisis. If you are elected, what would you do to strengthen families?

The ideas in question 2 would be a place to start. An improved educational system that encourages students to stay in school and provides an education that will lead to job skills will help. The job could be immediately out of high school, going to a University or other post secondary education setting, to prepare for jobs with a better income to be able to provide for their families.

4. The percentage of children in poverty in New Mexico is 26% higher than the national average. There are many factors contributing to this phenomenon including the fact that 45% of infants in New Mexico are born to teen parents. If you are elected, how would you reduce the number of teen pregnancies in New Mexico?

See # 2 above. I would work to provide health care to teens where they are. This would include preventative care, and birth control, as well as sex education and counseling.

5. Studies show that couple relationship education (e.g., conflict resolution, communication skills, understanding of gender differences, etc.) results in happier and healthier marriages. What programs and services are available to couples and families in your district?

Being in the Northeast Heights of Albuquerque there are many more options than in more rural areas. But having services near-by does not mean that they will be used. There are many confounding factors, including inability to pay, embarrassment, lack of awareness of what is available and lack of understanding when the services should be used or how it could benefit them. This leads back to the idea of having these types of services discussed and available where families are, including high schools, WIC offices, Income Support offices, clinics and other places.

6. How can the NM Coalition for Healthy Families help you strengthen families in New Mexico?

All of the ideas discussed above are good. I do not claim to be an expert on these areas and am always willing to learn from people who know these issues inside and out, so I would lean on the NM Coalition for Healthy Families to work with me if I am elected.

7. Do you have any additional ideas or comments regarding New Mexico's families?

I worked for many years providing Early Intervention services to infants and toddlers and their families. I have seen the best and the worst of situations, and how much difference support and education for parents can make. I am a very firm believer in early education for children as well as their parents, especially before they ever become parents.