§ 409-i. Short title; legislative findings; purpose. 1. This title shall be known and may be cited and referred to as the "teenage services act".

2. The legislature finds that the rising incidence of adolescent pregnancy and teenage parenthood is the subject of a widespread and growing concern. As a result of early pregnancy, the attainment of needed education and job skills is often curtailed. Coupled with the added responsibilities accompanying parenthood, these young families are often locked into long term public dependency. Studies have confirmed that up to sixty percent of the current aid to families with dependent children cases in New York state are headed by mothers who were teenagers when they gave birth to their first child. In fact, the predominant cause of welfare dependency in New York state may well be due to the result of teenage pregnancy and adolescent motherhood. The objective of this title is to increase the potential of these youths to become financially independent by helping the teenager to complete her education, and receive sufficient manpower skills for participation in the labor market.

The department of social services is not only statutorily required to provide financial support to these dependent teenagers and their children, but also has equal responsibility to provide personal counselling and support services needed to strengthen family life and provide opportunities for economic independence. In order to facilitate accessibility to the full range of needed services, case management responsibilities should be assigned to appropriate local social services staff or to authorized agencies outside of the department. Any reluctance or refusal on the part of the teenager to participate in a program of services shall not carry any threat of fiscal sanctions as regards public assistance benefits. In the event that a teenager refuses to participate, it shall be the responsibility of the local social services district to make continued and repeated efforts to engage the teenager in a counselling relationship which has as its result a mutually agreed upon service plan which meets the objectives of this title.

Therefore, this title provides for the establishment of a service case management system in order to strengthen the service role of the department of social services. Local social services districts shall be required to separate public assistance cases involving pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers under eighteen years of age, and assign ongoing case management services for such caseloads to appropriate staff responsible for service delivery. By defining such specialized caseloads, personal counselling and provision of needed community-based support services will be facilitated. Such case management activities shall also include the follow-up and evaluation of services rendered.

The enactment of the provisions of this title shall maximize the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of support services provided on behalf of pregnant adolescents and teenage parents under eighteen years of age, thereby reducing the long-term dependency needs of this youthful population.