



Mary's
Center

Testimony of
Maria Gomez President and CEO of
Mary's Center

Before the
COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Budget Oversight Hearing
of the
District of Columbia Health Benefit Exchange Authority

Tuesday, April 28, 2015
John A. Wilson Building
Room 120
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004

Good morning Councilwoman Alexander and committee members.

My name is Maria Gomez, President and CEO of Mary's Center.

Mary's Center was founded in 1988 as a community-based nonprofit to address the needs of recently arrived immigrants from Central America. Today Mary's Center is a well-established Federally Qualified Health Center serving DC residents throughout the city with two operating health centers in Wards 1 and 4. In 2015, we are poised to serve over 40,000 individuals.

Mary's Center's Social Change Model addresses the social determinants of health by tackling many of the social, economic and educational barriers that are at the root of some of our poor health outcomes in the community.

Mary's Center hosts assisters through the DC Health Benefit Exchange Authority.

We believe strongly in the mission of the DC Health Benefit Exchange Authority, and we have worked closely with them from the start to make sure that all of the District's uninsured get affordable coverage and that the process is as smooth as possible.

Many of our participants prior to the Affordable Care Act were unable to obtain coverage for various reasons: cost, pre-existing medical conditions, and other circumstances that limited their ability to obtain coverage. With the the implementation of the District's marketplace DC Health Link, District residents now have the opportunity to apply for affordable coverage and no longer have to delay care due to lack of insurance.

In the last 7 months over 100,000 individuals have enrolled through DC Health Link. We are proud to say that over 20K were individuals enrolling in private health plans. Close to 70,000 were eligible for Medicaid and the rest qualified through the small business market place, a population that has chronically been uninsured

We are most proud this second enrollment period of the collaborative work that has occurred between the Authority and the community agencies including DCPCA. The coordination of activities amongst all the players to do the outreach and education has been extraordinary. The "ONE TOUCH enrollment" where individuals can get enrolled in one visit has been the key to success. To be able to do identity proofing and to have the swat team from ESA available for questions at that one touch visit has been invaluable.

I like to advocate for the continuation of this program in order to enhance the education and case management that is needed to keep individuals enrolled and using their benefit to improve the overall health outcomes of our community. For us in healthcare, that is ultimately the only reason to work tirelessly to enroll individuals – to have a healthier community.

With the now 17 -page renewal form for Medicaid individuals, we need assisters to address questions and provide the interpretation to file this form correctly. At Mary's Center, our DC

Health Link Assisters provide bilingual English/Spanish health insurance enrollment assistance; connect consumers to social support services, and work to advance health insurance literacy. Health insurance literacy must continue to be the Authority's top priority.

We do have one concern while we are getting people enrolled on paper it is taking way above the 45 days and some up to 6 months to become fully enrolled through ESA. Perhaps through better coordination between the Authority and ESA this process can be expedited. In Maryland for instance, the Navigators can access the ESA system through a special portal to verify that all supporting documents are in and actually do identity proofing on their own.

In summary, District residents have benefited greatly from DC Health Link and the excellent service it provides. Mary's Center is a proud DC Health Link Assister Program partner that experiences the daily positive impact of effective in-person consumer assistance in action.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.