

**Testimony of
Anabel Cruz-Montesano
Mary's Center Participant**

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

11:00-12:00

COMMITTEE ON AGING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

District of Columbia

City Council

Dear District of Columbia City Council Members and those present today:

I am here today representing the student families of Mary's Center and the Even Start Program to request that you keep all the funding for the Office of Latino Affairs (OLA) because they help to fund the Mary's Center clinic. This clinic helps my family and me in many different and important ways.

My name is Anabel Cruz-Montesano. I have been a patient at Mary's Center for 9 years. I'm a mother of two children, and I'm pregnant now as well. Mary's Center has helped me with my prenatal care for all my children. They have helped me to get my health care insurance, WIC, and they have referred me to other excellent programs such as the Even Start Program to further my education.

Participating in Even Start has been very important for me. I'm from Mexico and my English was limited. My social worker told me about this amazing program. I have been learning English, computers, and parenting in this program since 2006. I started in the Intermediate I class and am proud to say that I have moved up 3 levels and am now in the Advanced II class.

My oldest child was only nine months old when he started in the program, and now he is 4 years old. Due to his participation in this program, he is highly prepared to start school. At Even Start, I learned how to be my child's first teacher. I learned how to help him in many ways. I learned how to use positive discipline strategies and how to set limits and create routines. I learned how to read books to him with enthusiasm. I have also learned how important it is to be involved in my child's education and school. I know I can make a difference in his education and in his life.

My second child is in the toddler classroom now and both of them love their teachers and the program just as much as I do. I can see the difference between my children and other children who are enrolled in regular daycares. I see that my children are more confident and friendly. They truly enjoy being a part of the program too. My family is very lucky to have found Mary's Center and most importantly for me is having found the Even Start Program.

If I had not participated in Mary's Center and Even Start I would not have been able to set and achieve some of my most important goals such as: studying for my Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate and being elected to Even Start's Board of Directors. My children would not have been school-ready and properly socialized such as: learning to share and take turns and respecting other children's possessions and opinions. Because of the Even Start Program, my children really enjoy school and have a genuine love for learning.

I learned recently that 50% of Hispanic children in the District do not graduate from high school. That will not be my child and it will not be the children of other Even Start participants.

Please keep supporting OLA because they not only fund organizations that provide services such as health or education, but they also prepare families to be successful as professionals, in school, in our city, and in the future.