



Testimony in support of the DC Health Benefit Exchange Authority (DCHBX) before the Committee on Health Performance Oversight Hearing (Chair, Vincent C. Gray)

Christian Narro, Health Access Program Manager at Mary's Center

Good morning Chairman Gray and members of the committee. My name is Christian Narro and I am the Health Access Program Manager at Mary's Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center located in Wards 1, 4, and 5 in the District of Columbia, as well as in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland. I am here to present testimony in support of the DC Health Benefit Exchange Authority (DCHBX) for Fiscal Year 2017.

Mary's Center's mission is to build better futures through the delivery of health care, education, and social services. Our Social Change Model addresses the collective determinants of health by tackling the social, economic, and educational barriers that are at the root of many of the poor health outcomes in our communities. Many of our participants prior to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) were unable to obtain coverage for reasons that included affordability, pre-existing medical conditions, and not being offered through their employer.

We believe strongly in the mission of the DCHBX and since the first year of the options offered through the ACA in 2013, we have worked with DC Health Link to ensure that all citizens of the District, who are uninsured, recognize what they are eligible for and get covered.

Through the leadership of DC Health Link, Mary's Center's In Person Assisters (IPAs) are provided with the necessary support to ensure the city is covered with their services at events that sustain all in recognition of what they are eligible for and how to apply. This initiative assists DC Health Link to achieve its mission of decreasing the number of uninsured residents in the District of Columbia. In fact, the District's uninsured rate has been cut in half, resulting in more than 96 percent of its residents having health coverage today, making DC one of the top cities in the country. This is the highest insured rate in the District's history.

Since the inception of the ACA, DC Health Link has served more than 300,000 people and small business. At Mary's Center, we have helped an estimate of 7,020 individuals and enrolled approximately 2,160 of them since the first Open Enrollment Period (OEP) in 2013. Additionally, Mary's Center's partnership with DC Health Link has yielded successful outreach events, such as the LGBTQ Outreach Event in December of 2015, and two Health Leadership Symposiums this past January and last year, respectively. Furthermore, Mary's Center participated in numerous other DC Health Link enrollment events, including the One Touch Enrollment Centers at Carlos Rosario PCS.



While the statistics speak to the Assisters' remarkable work, the most important piece is that District residents now have the ability to obtain affordable and comprehensive coverage to seek services for their medical needs, which had previously been impossible for so many residents. Moreover, DC Health Link's funding is necessary for case management and health literacy education that newly insured individuals need. It is through this case management that residents understand how to identify a medical home, how to ensure that their insurance does not lapse, what the premiums are, etc. Case Management activities are integral to the funding support provided by DC Health Link and continue throughout the year. Year-round funding is vital to the success of the program.

The DC Health Benefit Exchange Authority has done tremendous work throughout the community and works tirelessly to support the goal of ensuring that all District residents know that there is an affordable coverage option for them. District residents have benefited greatly from DC Health Link and the excellent service it provides, as is the case with Aster, a U.S. citizen who had signed up for a Qualified Health Plan (QHP) during OEP 3. Aster's hours had been reduced at her job and she was no longer able to afford a QHP. Aster—a childless adult—was relieved to find out she was determined eligible for Medicaid, thanks to the Medicaid expansion through the ACA (and to our Assister Tamrat, who helped with this process).

Manuel is another DC resident, who was saved thanks to DC Health Link and the ACA. He was born deaf and had some challenges applying for health coverage in the past. Thanks to the help of another of our IPAs and a sign-language interpreter, Manuel was incredibly grateful for obtaining the coverage he needed, just in time to be seen by a specialist with whom he had an appointment.

Despite threats from the current administration to repeal the ACA, which could bring particularly devastating consequences to low-income and elderly DC residents, Mary's Center fully supports DCHBX. District residents deserve to have continued insurance coverage by making sure DC Health Link is a fully funded health insurance marketplace. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today