



**Testimony for a Bipartisan Briefing on the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program in front of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means**

**Joan Yengo, Chief Program Officer**

Good Afternoon members of the Committee, my name is Joan Yengo, Chief Program Officer, from Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, Inc.

Mary's Center, founded in 1988 in Washington DC as a nonprofit has been a federally qualified health center since 2005. Our mission at Mary's Center is to build better futures through the delivery of health care, social services, and education. Our social change model integrates these three major services with the sole purpose of saving lives, stabilizing families, and strengthening communities. We operate three health centers in Washington DC, two in Maryland, and in 2015 provided services to over 36,000 participants. Our vision is that by working together, we help members of all communities be their own advocates and produce generations of leaders ready to contribute to their community's growth and well being.

Since we began, Mary's Center has understood the important role that the home visitation strategy has in ensuring families are receiving the supports and services necessary based upon their needs. These programs often work with those members of our community who have the greatest needs but have found the systems in their localities unresponsive, judgmental, or stigmatizing.

For eighteen years Mary's Center has been implementing the evidence based home visiting program Healthy Families America and for the past 4 years Parents As Teachers. Evidence-based, voluntary, home visitation programs are the core components of strategies that address the indicators that often lead to poor prenatal, child, and family health. By building on parents' strengths and existing resources, home visitation reduces stress in parenting, and enables parents to respond to their own needs so that they can better provide for the health and well-being of their child. These supports are accomplished using a strengths-based, family-centered methodology and an interdisciplinary team that includes a Supervisor, Family Support Workers (FSWs), and Parent Resource Workers (PRWs).

The HFA and PAT models are designed to allow each community to develop their home visiting program based upon the needs of that community. Our experience over the years has led us to develop a program the supports parents' ability to enroll during their pregnancy (HFA) and up



# Mary's Center

Quality healthcare. Stronger communities.

to the child's 2nd year of life (PAT) and remain in the program for up to five years. We support entry during pregnancy to support a parent's access and linkage to their prenatal provider, and thus a healthy birth outcome. We are all too familiar with the costs of babies born too early, not having adequate prenatal care, and the costs associated with preterm births. Additionally, as we link the parents to quality prenatal care, we help families to understand how to engage with their medical provider to reduce the use of the Emergency Room; Not only saving money, but improving overall health with the child receiving appropriate well baby visits, immunizations, and other screening supporting their development. Additionally, enrollment within the prenatal period and at birth allows the FSW to strengthen the ability of parents to be able to attach to their children during those first few years of life; we are all aware of the importance of parental attachment as the single greatest positive impact on resilience to those experiencing trauma or other life impacting events. Mary's Center receives referrals for participants identified as having health, economic, educational, psychosocial or other factors that could impact their ability to provide all they need for their child(ren). The models of HFA and PAT recognize the importance of working with all family members, and while often the mother is the first entry into the program, our team works to engage the father of the child so he recognizes his role is beyond financial provider, but also a very important part of that child's development and success in life.

The FSWs and PRWs possess those qualities necessary to support the parents based upon where they are, building on their strengths and successes to address their challenges and fears. Additionally, our staff is trained to implement different activities in the home that engage parents in their child's development and provide skills to support their child's success in school. A key component of the home visiting experience is the work of the FSW to link the parents with those resources that can best meet their needs. This may include educational opportunities, job training, resume writing, or agencies to address some serious concerns of depression, domestic violence, food insecurity and other areas impacting a family's ability to support themselves and their children.

summary, home visiting fits well within the vision of Mary's Center to support the overall health and wellbeing of those we serve, for as parents thrive and do well, their children do well and can become the future leaders of our next generation.

I will now introduce one of our parents from the PAT program who will share her experience with home visiting.