



Mary's Center

Quality healthcare. Stronger communities.

On April 21st, 2010, Mary's Center's Founder and CEO, Maria Gomez, testified alongside a Mary's Center doctor and four participants as to why the Office of Latino Affairs (OLA) should not be defunded. It was because of the OLA that Maria was able to establish Mary's Center in 1989 and Maria argues that the Latino population is still underserved and needs assistance. As the OLA helps fund Mary's Center and their programs, Mary's Center participants testified about the ways that Mary's Center helped them navigate the medical world, understand and advocate for their children, and improve their own lives to become more financially independent and stable.

Maria S. Gómez, R.N., M.P.H. President/CEO

Good afternoon Councilwoman Alexander and members of the Committee. My name is Maria Gomez and I am the President and CEO of Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care. I am here today to share my deep concern for the proposed dismantling of the Office on Latino Affairs.

The Office on Latino Affairs is solely responsible for the foresight 22 years ago to see the need for a program like Mary's Center that would care for the needs of pregnant women without health insurance, fleeing their countries to stay alive and with their shirt on their back as their only possession. The Office on Latino Affairs saw the need, spoke up and demanded solutions.

Mary's Center partners with individuals and families to provide a healthy birth outcome, stay healthy throughout their life cycle, supported in their communities and moving up the economic ladder. Because we know that their success is our city's success.

Mary's Center today serves over 16,000 families from all over the city and the world. Our budget is 14 million. This translates to \$875 per participant per year to provide full health care services, intensive case management and literacy to parents and their children so that they are prepared to succeed in school. As you can see one of our several classrooms is here today. Each one of these families is here to thank you for your years of support and to tell you that their success is in your hands.

As a resident of the District of Columbia for over 40 years I am not convinced that we have matured enough in this city to abolish the Office of Latino Affairs.

Without the eyes and voice in government and the strong community partnerships that exist with the OLA, Latinos will not be treated justly and will be relegated to the back of the bus as we were 30 years ago. We have come a long way and the services that are provided through OLA's grant dollars are invaluable but do not compare to the saving we are getting, as a city, by



keeping thousands of individuals healthy, well supported in their communities and prepared to succeed in life. As the need has increased in the community the funding for OLA has decreased from 5M to 2M in only the last four years.

The proposed cutting of the Office on Latino Affairs budget by 43% in 2011 is signaling to me as a voter of this city that Latinos do not matter. It is shortsighted to balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable - for history has shown us that our economic success and our individual safety and well being is intrinsically dependent on all communities rising up at the same time. Thank you for the opportunity before you, today.

Rosemarie Arminta Rollins-Folks, M.D. Medical Director Adult Medicine

My name is Rosemarie Rollins-Folks and I am a board certified physician at Mary's Center. I have been working at Mary's Center for a little over 5 years. Mary's Center provides medical services to an underserved population in the District of Columbia. Many of our patients are Latinos from Central and South America but we also see patients from Africa and Asia. I see patients every day during the week and recently started seeing patients on Saturday

Last Saturday the Funeral Home called me for to sign the death certificate for a precious patient who came to an unfortunate death earlier this year. Going through the case was like reliving every consultation, every conversation, every experience and memory that she shared with me and the team at Mary's Center. It was difficult. Patient M was a young 23 year old female that had multiple visits to ED and eventually a hospitalization. Because of language barriers, she continued to return to the hospital thinking she was going to receive continued treatment. She had poor understanding of her disease and she did not know the effective route to facilitate her treatment which led to multiple emergency room visits and eventual delay of care. Eventually she found her way here at Mary's Center but it was already too late as she had advanced disease. Unfortunately this patient died. One of the factors in her complications was that she was unable to find navigational services like the ones we have at Mary's Center. I can tell many more stories about my patients but I stand here today at the Council to advocate for my patients at Mary's Center and their need for support services including education, navigation, and family holistic care.

Our patients at Mary's Center have a very low literacy level, low English proficiency have a poor understanding of health and preventive services. In addition, there are cultural barriers. Mary's Center addresses these barriers through our Health Promotional Department staff which include Navigational Services, Diabetic Management, Smoking Cessation and Asthma Program, to name a few . Our health promotion staff assists our patient in the coordination of their



medical care by providing nutritional classes, prenatal classes and Cuerpo Sano (which demonstrates healthy control in daily life in adults and kids). They also provide Counseling Services for Sexually transmitted diseases. A lot of these services have preventive implications, for example in smoking cessation/asthma prevention, our current target are children with asthma in smoking households. In a lot of these programs, education is provided to the entire family and the health promotion department works with illiteracy challenges using illustrations. An example is the diabetic conversational map which uses illustrations and colors and come down to the patient's level in order that the patients can understand as they cannot read. These services help us as the medical providers treat the patient holistically and not just as the disease or ailment. Without the clinical coordination with health promotion and other social services at Mary's Center our patients run the risk of being tossed back and forth like Patient M without any coordination of their care. In fact patients will actually get sicker ensuing cost to escalate.

OK I am in the mood for one more story. Let me give you another example of Patient XH. She is a 26 year old that was diagnosed with Gastric Cancer. With the Navigational Services she was able to utilize the services that Mary's Center provides such as coordination of care which helped her get the biopsy, and the gastrectomy, and chemotherapy and radiation. She was linked to our collaborators by our health promotion services with Nueva Vida and other services to assist her family during these difficult times. In addition the staff went to the medical oncology and radiation oncology appointments with the patient. These services here at Mary's Center assisted in coordinating her care and improve the management of treatment. She is currently doing well.

Right now the discussion on the table is the proposed budget cut and such a proposal will only increase the margin of people who do not have access to these services. With the proposed budget cut and consequential lack of preventive programs such as smoking cessation, diabetic rotational clinic, asthma prevention we run the risk of allowing already high incidences (increased asthma/respiratory illness) to run rampant without checks and potentially cause an even greater fiscal strain on the health system within the District . This budget cut will affect our staffing and we will not be able to provide the educational services, and this will end up hurting the most vulnerable patients in our community. A patient confronting a health crisis can be overwhelming. While a lot of our patients are non English speakers, the health care system also posses navigational difficulty to those who do speak English. Our health promotion department helps educate, prevent and manage the health and well being of our patients. By decreasing the budget you will increase the number of patient M's and increase the morbidity and mortality here in the District. Again my voice is here for the patients and I plea to you on



their behalf. As a commitment to the needs of these patients you must restore the funding to OLA (Office of Latino Affairs) to ensure that our patients continue to get the wrap around health services at Mary's Center that they deserve and need. Please do not cut budget.

Ramon Compres Mary's Center Participant

Good morning. My name is Ramon Compres. I am originally from the Dominican Republic, but I've been living in the United States for the last 30 years.

When I learned about the budget cuts from OLA that will affect Mary's Center, I felt that I needed to come here today to tell my story and make you aware of the important work that Mary's Center does in the community for people like me, my wife, my children and all those I see every time I visit the Center. I have had diabetes for 27 years and, as you can imagine, it has been a very difficult battle for me. The lack of health insurance, the elevated costs of the treatments, and the health complications that come with this disease are just a few of the obstacles I have found during these years.

Mary's Center is my medical home and the place that has kept me alive and going. I have been a patient there since the Center opened the doors for adult males in 2004.

When someone asked me what I did before that, I responded: tried not to get sick. And it's true. I couldn't allow myself to get sick and I had to hold off any pain, headache, or strong cold because I couldn't afford to pay for that. I needed the money to pay for my diabetes treatment with private doctors.

Becoming a Mary's Center patient changed my life and reduced my past's daily stress. At Mary's Center, they helped me enroll into DC Health Care Alliance which is paying for my treatment and all my regular check-ups.

In the last 9 years, I have had 6 different surgeries. I only have less than one third of my colon. I also have problems with my intestines and my stomach, and I have high cholesterol and hypertension. I don't know how much of that has to do with my diabetes, but I do know that it does affect my health somehow.

Mary's Center takes care of all of these health problems with the most caring, dedicated and professional staff. They are always there for me and they are on top of everything that has to do with my health. Every time I come for my check ups, they make sure I get everything I need and that my prescription is on time at the pharmacy. Dr. Rollins, who is my provider, even calls me personally to give me the test results and through Mary's Center educational classes on diabetes, I have learned how to live with the disease and have a better life style.



I think I have learned well because I feel active and helpful to society. I couldn't be in better hands. I work at a restaurant in Washington, DC and I know I still have a lot to contribute to the community.

I can't imagine what people like me and like so many others who seek care at Mary's Center will do if we can't continue receiving the services for lack of funds. It is not just about one disease, but about our well-being.

I am here to advocate for Mary's Center's services and programs and I ask you to consider the budget cuts on behalf of thousands of families who need the Mary's Center services. Thank you!

Victor Reategui Mary's Center Participant

Good morning. It is an honor to be here representing Mary's Center today. My name is Victor Reategui. I am originally from Peru and I have lived here since 1980.

I have been fighting against addiction to drugs and alcohol for 40 years. I don't drink or smoke anymore, but I will consider myself a drug addict and alcoholic until the last day of my life because the damage will be there forever.

Mary's Center helped change my life and gave hope to my future. When I came to Mary's Center in August 2008, I was not drinking anymore but I was still smoking cigarettes and marijuana.

I learned about Mary's Center's services in the newspaper. I came for help and they opened their doors to me. I received help, support, and advice and I am proud to say that thanks to Mary's Center, I quit smoking on September 2, 2008, and two months later, I left marijuana on November 4 at 5:30 pm. For many of you, the date and the time may not sound relevant- but for me, it is very significant since it's a huge challenge for a person who depended on these addictions for 4 decades.

I tried to stop drinking and smoking many times before but never succeeded. Mary's Center's staff made it easier for me. They were patient and gave me all the tools to make the decision to quit. They also gave me counseling and medications and showed me the consequences I would face if I didn't stop my addiction.

Smoking was the first thing I did when I woke up every morning. I knew it was bad and I knew I wanted to stop but I didn't have the courage to do it. I was spending more than \$10,000 - dollars-a year in cigarettes and marijuana and I was smoking 2 to 3 packs of cigarettes every



day. I was destroying my life and my wife's life through second-hand smoke which caused her to suffer as much as I did.

Today, 17 months later, I am a different person and human being. I can breathe a better air, I can exercise, and I can sleep in peace. I even have even learned to better use my money and soon I will be able to buy a car, which I couldn't in the past because I was afraid of driving drunk.

My health is in much better condition and Mary's Center continues taking care of me. Decreasing funds to centers like Mary's Center is making the city sicker and weaker. I respectfully ask you to consider cutting the budget to programs that benefit the residents of the District of Columbia. Thank you!

Diana de Leon Mary's Center Participant

Good morning, my name is Diana de Leon. I am Mary's Center patient since 2005 when I arrived from Guatemala. I was 5 months pregnant. I came to join my husband and even though I was happy to be with him again, it was not easy to start a new life in a new country, without knowing the language and the system. Besides, I didn't know anything about motherhood and the arrival of a baby was a total new experience.

Everything seemed so difficult and out of my hands but Mary's Center showed me the way, and still does.

From Mary's Center I've received more than I would ever expect. It is a one-stop shop where I've been able to benefit from the medical services as well as the social and educational services.

At Mary's Center I receive prenatal care for both of my children, David who will turn 5 in September and this one, who will be with us in June. My son receives all of his immunizations and medical care, and the early childhood program prepared him to go to school while I was attending their English classes as part of their family literacy program. I still don't feel completely comfortable speaking in English but soon I will be able to do it and At the prenatal classes, I've learn important information about the arrival of my babies and how to be prepared for motherhood. The family support workers help mare always willing to help and I even receive home visitation receive the support from the family support workers

If you ask for a good place to shop for services, I would tell you that Mary's Center is the one. Desde el 2005 cuando embarazada de David. Vino de Guatemala 5 meses de embarazo, tenia doctor y cuando vino no sabia por donde y suegra la refirió a mc. Esposo se quedo vendiendo



cosas y sola. El ya vivía aquí. Mc sin saber nada y comenzó cuidado prenatal. Vino a clases prenatales como no experiencia vino y así aprendió a darse cuenta como era el proceso del embarazo y le empezaron a dar información de padres como criar hijo, wic. Clases para inglés. Intermedio y luego se fue. Hasta el 11 en guate y aquí GED para terminar por la edad. Hizo el GED. Dos años y lo sacó en uno. Kemeka iba a casa porque aceptaba todo son los que más le ha gustado. No sabía como papeles, idioma, overwhelming, venía y me explicaban y la acompañaban a ultrasonido la guiaron con todo. Ahora con Laura. Embarazada ahora.

David cumple 5 en septiembre el 19. Embarazada y nace el junio 3. Es niño. Aquí cuidado prenatal, clases prenatales, cuando nazca clases para seguir. El niño viene, wic, home visiting. Que pasaría: no tendría muchas ayudas y no sabría a donde ir. Uno se queda sin nada. Si cortaran programas, no sabía que hacer. Vivo next door. Todo más fácil. !

Anabel Cruz-Montesano Mary's Center Participant

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.