

Supporting expectant and new parents will last a lifetime!

Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation

Testimony to the

Joint Legislative Budget Committee on Health

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On behalf of the Board of Directors and the families we serve, the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation thanks you for supporting a highly effective and essential prevention program serving the needs of the most vulnerable families in our state. **We urgently need your commitment to support restoration of funding in the Department of Health Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation.** Without your support, we face extinction because the 2016-17 State Budget only provides \$283,300, a reduction of \$310,000 from the 2015-16 funding level of \$593,300. We look to you to do what you have done for the past 30 years, protect the underserved young families living in extreme poverty in your communities and give them a chance to be part of the New York State of Opportunity. **Please restore the line item in the 2016-17 State Health Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation with an appropriation of \$1,000,000.**

BACKGROUND

The Maternity & Early Childhood Foundation is dedicated to the health and well-being of New York's most vulnerable young moms, dads, and their babies. Your support helps MECF make a lifetime of difference by nurturing healthy moms and dads, ensuring healthy babies and teaching positive parenting. Our mission is to ensure a safe and healthy birth of a child and the protect well-being of the mother by supporting and promoting services to those pregnant and parenting women who are most in need.

The New York State Budget has long supported the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation, Inc. (MECF). MECF is a not for profit agency that was founded in 1983 through the efforts of a few forward-thinking individuals including members of the New York State Legislature who realized the importance of supporting young parents at a most crucial time: the birth of a child. Research demonstrates the critical need for preventive intervention for at-risk families that begins prenatally and continues through the first three years of life.

Thanks to your support, MECF received \$593,300 in the 2015-16 enacted State Budget. With those funds, we supported services in **19 high need communities across New York State** where other community services are often limited or nonexistent. **Through December 2015, 1,102 pregnant and parenting women were served.**

NEED FOR SERVICES

Most of the families served by MECF funded programs are living in extreme poverty with unstable housing, lack of transportation and little or no employment. More than **47%** of the parents enroll in the program prenatally - the best time to make a positive impact on health of the baby and the mother. **49% of the pregnant women served are teenagers. Pregnant teens are least likely to get early and regular prenatal care and are more likely to have a low birthweight baby. One third of teen moms do not finish high school. 64% of children born to teen moms live in poverty and are three times as likely to be incarcerated in their adolescence. Also, a recent news article points to the increased incidence of pregnant teens addicted to drugs and the impact on newborn babies.**

In addition to teen pregnancy, New York State has troubling discrepancies in health outcomes for pregnant women:

- **One in four children in New York State live in poverty and in many urban areas the rate is much higher.**

- **The New York State rate for maternal mortality is twice as high as the national rate.**
- **The NYS rate for low birth weight (LBW) is 8.2% and very low birth weight (VLBW) is 1.5%. The rate of LBW for Black non-Hispanic women is 13%.**
- **The NYS rate of pregnant women who receive early prenatal care (within the first trimester) is 72%. For Black non-Hispanic women, it is 60.6%. For Hispanic women, it is 63.6%.**
- **46% of the births in New York State are funded through Medicaid indicating a very large underserved impoverished population.**

The Foundation selects funded programs through a rigorous Request for Proposal process. Funding is distributed efficiently to provide services in high need communities so that there are no gaps in service delivery. MECF funded services include outreach to pregnant women who might not seek prenatal care, assistance with access to health insurance, crisis intervention, parenting skills training, information on baby safety, and support for education and employment goals. The MECF funded programs provide a positive support, help to reduce stress and give parents hope for a better future.

A TRUE STORY

A young Mom reflected on the support she received from **Community Maternity Services**, a MECF funded program that serves six counties in upstate New York. When the program started working with her, the Mom was a pregnant teenager enrolled in high school. As a senior, she spoke eloquently at the MECF Fall Luncheon held last October. She mentioned that her thirteen month old son was born two weeks early and was in the fifth percentile for size. Her thirteen month old son is now in the 95th percentile. The Mom is doing well in high school and has won accolades for her achievement at a BOCES competition. She placed second in the state in a Skills USA competition. She is looking forward to enrolling in college and has received attention from many colleges. She noted that the support she received from the caseworker at CMS was so helpful for her. She said "It's important for teen moms to know that you do need help, and help is available. We do have support systems – even if it's not your own family, support is there! You will have help to be the best mom you can be!"

Community Maternity Services (CMS) provides in-home services for low income isolated pregnant and parenting teens living in the rural counties of Schoharie, Otsego, Fulton, Montgomery, Warren and Washington counties. The staff connects the young parents with prenatal care and health insurance. They teach the Moms infant safety and positive parenting. They promote healthy life styles including smoking cessation, and encourage the Moms and Dads to finish school.

FUNDED PROGRAMS

MECF funded programs target services needed by their communities. For example, in Suffolk County, the Economic Opportunity Council helps young Hispanic pregnant and parenting teens in five high schools learn positive parenting and earn their high school degree. In Chautauqua and Cattaraugus counties, the Baby & Me Tobacco Free Program is a prenatal/postpartum smoking cessation program that helps pregnant women quit smoking, tests them with a CO monitor to prove their smoke-free status, and provides free diapers as an incentive to not smoke after the baby is born. Momma's House and Catholic Charities of Rockville Centre on Long Island and Mercy Residential Services in Monroe County provide supportive housing for homeless pregnant teens to ensure they have healthy babies and finish high school. MECF programs in East Harlem, Astoria, and Bedford

Stuyvesant provide nursing services, case management and parent education to low income immigrant pregnant and parenting teens and young parents who don't have access to needed services. Similar programs are provided in Buffalo and other upstate rural communities. The YWCA of Jamestown supports the TEAM program that provides parenting education and encourages the teen moms finish high school. The program noted that since 1992, 208 teens have graduated from high school, 91% of the participating teens.

OUR IMPACT

We recognize that the state must do business differently. We believe that we are doing just that - building a strong future for New York by supporting young families at such an important time, the birth of a child and first years of life. MECF funded services are a cost effective and efficient alternative to longer term foster care and Medicaid costs. The cost of providing services before the family faces the child welfare system is much less than the cost of foster care, and the impact of these services on child wellbeing cannot be overstated. The MECF funded services reduce Medicaid costs by reducing the risk of low birthweight and other poor health outcomes for the mother and baby.

MECF is a cost-efficient and accountable program that saves local and state government financial resources over the long-term. Many parents need encouragement and support to go beyond the day to day challenges of being a parent and living in poverty. One young dad said about his MECF program, "You help parents feel like they *are* something!"

We are asking the Legislature to give young vulnerable families a chance for a better life by restoring the State Health Department line item in the 2016-17 State Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation with an appropriation of \$1,000,000. We are counting on you to keep our most vulnerable citizens, our children and their struggling families, among your top priorities. An increased appropriation of \$1 million dollars will allow the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation to support services in 50 high need communities across New York State serving at least 2000 low income pregnant and parenting women and their children. After years of drastic funding cuts, this increase in funding will put MECF close to its 2009-10 state funding level of \$1.2 million.

As you reflect on how to invest state funds, please consider that the best returns clearly will come from New York's greatest resource – its children! Every child deserves a chance to grow in a safe, nurturing home and have the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. We hope that New York's leaders envision a bright future for all New Yorkers by supporting the work of the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation!

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this request. Together we can build strong families and break the cycle of poverty.

**MATERNITY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION
2015-16 GRANT AWARDS**

Agency	Target Area	Services Provided	Grant Amount
Catholic Charities of Buffalo	City of Buffalo, Erie County	Parent Education, Home Visiting Services	\$25,000.00
YWCA of Jamestown	Chautauqua County	In-home Parent Education for pregnant and parenting teens	\$25,000.00
Independent Health Foundation	Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties	Smoking Cessation for Pregnant Women	\$25,000.00
Mercy Community Services	Rochester, Monroe County	Parent Education for Homeless Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
Catholic Charities Livingston	Livingston County	In-home Parent Education, mentoring	\$25,000.00
Catholic Charities of Onondaga County	Syracuse, Onondaga County	Parent Education for Pregnant Teens	\$25,000.00
Oswego Opportunities	Oswego County	Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
North Country Family Health	Jefferson County	Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson	Jefferson and Lewis Counties	Parent Education, Home Visiting Services	\$25,000.00
Catholic Charities of Franklin Counties	Franklin	In-home Parent Education for pregnant and parenting teens	\$25,000.00
Community Maternity Services of Fulton/Montgomery	Fulton and Montgomery Counties	In-Home Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
Community Maternity Services of Schoharie and Otsego Counties	Schoharie and Otsego Counties	In-Home Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
Community Maternity Services of Warren and Washington Counties	Warren and Washington Counties	In-Home Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
Little Sisters of the Assumption	East Harlem	In-Home Health Visits, Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Immigrant Women	\$25,000.00
Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services	Corona and Astoria, Queens	Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Immigrant Women	\$25,000.00
Bedford Stuyvesant Family Health Center	Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn	Parent Education for Homeless Pregnant Teens	\$25,000.00
MOMMA'S Inc	Nassau and Suffolk Counties	Parent Education for Homeless Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
Catholic Charities of Rockville Centre	Nassau County	Mentoring and Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00
Economic Opportunity Council of Suffolk	Suffolk County	School and Home Based Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens	\$25,000.00