



# Maternity & Early Childhood Foundation

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Health/Medicaid  
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On behalf of the Board of Directors and the families we serve, the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation (MECF) thanks you for your continued support of our programs, which provide essential, nurturing services to children, families, and expectant parents in New York State.

**We urgently need your commitment to support the restoration of funding in the Department of Health Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation.** We look to you, our state's leadership, to continue what you have done for the past 36 years – invest in MECF services that support new and expectant parents in our communities from pregnancy through early childhood. **To ensure young parents and their infants receive timely, vital services, we respectfully ask for a total appropriation of \$727,000.**

### ***SUPPORTING NEW YORK FAMILIES SINCE 1983***

Since MECF's inception in 1983, the New York State Budget has supported our work to improve maternal and infant health outcomes and promote positive parenting in diverse communities across the state. MECF currently supports 16 community-based programs where other services are often limited or nonexistent. (See a full list of our programs attached.) These programs provide services such as:

- ) Outreach to parents who might not seek services
- ) Home-visiting services to ensure proper perinatal care
- ) parent education and counseling in group and individual settings
- ) crises intervention and case management
- ) assistance with health care coverage and appointments
- ) emergency services and supplies
- ) guidance furthering education and employment goals
- ) connections to other needed services like WIC, foster care or adoption counseling, nutrition workshops, mental health care, medical care, child care, lead testing, legal services, doula services, and so much more

MECF programs serve young families within the critical first 1,000 days, ensuring that moms and babies receive proper health care, and that parents are prepared to provide a safe, stable environment in which their children can learn, grow, and play. When New York families are thriving, New York communities are stronger.

Thanks to your support, the 2018-19 Enacted Budget provided a total of \$602,000 to MECF and an additional quarter was covered with \$56,750 from DOH, resulting in \$658,750 total state funding for the year. With those funds, from April 2018 through June 2019, MECF programs served 349 pregnant women, 1,070 parents, and 1,020 children. They provided 2,501 home visits, 971 group support sessions, and 6,403 individualized support sessions. Program staff delivered 2,414 emergency services and supplies and provided 1,249 transports.

**As it did last year, the Governor's proposed budget includes an appropriation of \$227,000 for MECF programs and services. In the Enacted Budget for 2019-20, the Legislature added an additional \$200,000 for a total appropriation of \$427,000.** With those funds, MECF programs have already served 1,300 individuals in the first half of our contract year. Despite this growth, many of our programs are alarmingly under-resourced. Some have had no choice but to place families (including pregnant teenagers) on wait lists because they do not have the resources or staff time to effectively serve them. Pregnancy and early childhood are time sensitive, and pregnant women and young children do not belong on wait lists. It is disheartening for staff who want to help but are unable to, and it is harmful to the families that are going through one of the most important changes of their lives without the support they need. On top of this, all programs have reported issues related to staff burnout and the impact their clients' trauma has on them (vicarious trauma). Many are facing difficulty hiring and retaining staff to effectively serve their communities. With additional funding, MECF programs would be able to support more staff time and serve more families.

## **NEW YORK MUST PRIORITIZE THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

MECF is thankful for your commitment to improve maternal and child health outcomes. Thanks to statewide efforts, the percentage of pregnant women in New York State who receive early prenatal care has increased, but about 20% of New York expectant mothers still do not. This figure increases to 30.6% for Black women and to 36.5% for all women under 20 years old. Early prenatal care helps reduce risks for mothers and babies, including low birth weights (under 5.5 lbs.), preterm births, and infant mortality. Black families are disproportionately affected by these risks. Black mothers are four times more likely to die during childbirth than white mothers. Their babies are twice as likely to die during infancy as white babies. Ninety-six percent of expectant mothers served by MECF programs in our 18-19 grant year secured continuous prenatal care throughout their pregnancy. In 2018-19, **MECF programs served diverse communities: 42% of individuals served identified as white, 25% as Black, 25% as Latinx, 4.4% as multiracial, and 4.6% as another race not listed. We need to address disparities in health outcomes by investing in supportive and preventative programs serving diverse populations.** The key to a bright future for all New Yorkers is sustained investment in all New York communities.

There is no doubt that the formative years of early childhood are important. During the first few years of life, more than one million neural connections are formed in the brain every second. These connections form as the child interacts with others – especially their parents and caregivers – and experiences their environment. A language-rich, safe, nurturing environment is essential to healthy childhood development, and establishes a strong foundation of skills needed for success in school and beyond.

**The ideal learning environment is not a reality for all New York children. The 2017-18 National Survey of Children's Health found that almost 20% of New York children ages 0-5 had experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE),** such as poverty or economic hardship, violence or abuse, food insecurity, neglect, or separation from family. The toxic stress associated with these experiences can seriously hinder brain development and create lasting barriers for the child. ACEs can impair a person's ability to respond to stress and can make it more difficult to establish and maintain relationships. Children with one or more ACEs are more likely to demonstrate behavior issues, aggression, depression or anxiety, and suffer long-term health problems. We need to invest in services for new families throughout New York, especially in diverse communities where services are either limited, nonexistent, or overwhelmed.

## **MECF PROGRAMS MAKE AN IMPACT**

MECF programs have been embedded in their communities – some, for decades – offering established, reliable sources of trust and support to the families they serve. **MECF programs respond directly to the specific needs of their own communities. Their teams are resourceful, creative, and ready to evolve as their communities change and grow.** For example, MECF program *Lullaby League* is a four-week birth and infant care course providing by Catholic Charities of Onondaga County in Syracuse, where 13.3% of the population is born outside of the United States. In response to an influx of new Americans, the team expanded the program by partnering with another community-based agency to provide translators. Now *Lullaby League* is offered in homes and community spaces to individuals and groups of parents and caregivers who speak languages other than English. Across the state, MECF-supported parent education classes have been taught in a variety of languages including Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, and Kirundi.

In order to thrive, children need a secure and stable home; and they are more likely to do better in homes with their parents or other kin rather than in foster care. Catholic Charities of Franklin County's *Parenting Support* staff recognized that many of their clients struggled to navigate the legal systems of foster care, child protective services, and Family Court. With the goal of helping these families be together as they belong, the team created a legal advocate position to ensure that families understand these systems and are supported by someone they know and trust. The legal advocate promotes self-advocacy skills, accompanies parents in court and meetings, clarifies legal documents, and connects parents to other community resources. Since the position was created last year, 21 families have been assisted. In close collaboration with the local Department of Social Services, *Parenting Support* also recently started offering supervised visitation in a comfortable, family-friendly space in their office. They've installed a video call system for families who are separated. Most importantly, staff at MECF programs, like *Parenting Support* and *Lullaby League*, build trusting, nurturing relationships with the families they serve, many of whom are isolated and have little or no

support.

MECF also hosts a free annual training for MECF-funded program staff as well as outside professionals serving children, families, and expectant parents. We are committed to spreading awareness regarding ACEs to those working in New York communities and use our training seminar as an opportunity to do so. Not only are ACEs preventable, but with proper trauma-responsive care and support, the consequences can be mitigated. It is imperative that direct service providers, teachers, parent educators, case managers, and others working with individuals with adverse histories are informed and prepared to support them and help them build the resiliency they need to overcome trauma and stress. At our 2019 training, MECF also offered workshops on vicarious trauma and self-care, and working with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds with a particular focus on the needs of new Americans. Our 2019 training seminar provided six free continuing education credits to Licensed Social Workers and Licensed Mental Health Counselors. MECF hopes to provide free continuing education credits to teachers and nurses at future training events.

***NEW YORK FAMILIES DESERVE TO THRIVE***

Families belong together in safe, stable homes where they can live, learn, and grow. They deserve to be and feel supported by a loving society that is invested in their success. The New York State Budget is a moral document that conveys our society's values and priorities – which should always include children and families. We respectfully request your consideration to include \$727,000 in funding for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation in the 2020-21 Budget in order to continue essential, empathetic services to young families in New York communities. Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to New York children and families.



*Children show their artwork at CCBQ's reading workshop for families.*

## 2019-2020 MECF-FUNDED PROGRAMS

### **Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens**

Through workshops and individual sessions, CCBQ's Parenting Program provides education, referrals, and support related to nutrition, prenatal care, positive parenting, and health and wellness to families in **Bay Ridge and Brownsville, Brooklyn and Astoria and Corona, Queens.**

### **Catholic Charities of Buffalo, NY**

The Young Parents Program provides group parenting classes, home-based services, and short-term supportive counseling to parents under 30 or first-time parents in the **City of Buffalo and Erie County.**

### **Catholic Charities of Franklin County**

Parenting Support: A Quilt of Services that Hold a Family Together provides home-visiting services, parent education, and legal advocacy to families in **Franklin County.**

### **Catholic Charities of Livingston County**

The Community of Caring Program provides parent education, counseling, and home-based services to women who are pregnant or parenting in **Livingston County.** The program also provides parent education to male and female inmates at **Livingston County Jail.**

### **Catholic Charities of Onondaga County**

The four-week Lullaby League course provides education regarding birthing, infant care, and parenting to pregnant and parenting women in **Onondaga County.**

### **Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rockville Centre**

Regina Maternity Services offers housing, case management, crisis intervention, and parent education to homeless and at-risk pregnant and parenting women in **Nassau and Suffolk Counties.**

### **Community Maternity Services**

Two CMS agencies offer goal-directed case management services, advocacy, parent education, and other supportive services to pregnant women and parents with children under four living in **Schoharie, Otsego, Warren, and Washington Counties.**

### **Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County**

Strengthening Family Foundations provides home-visiting services and group parent education workshops that focus on nutrition, healthy relationships and homes, and life skills to pregnant women and parents with children under five living in **Jefferson and Lewis Counties.**

### **Delaware Opportunities, Inc.**

The Better Beginnings Program is a series of parent education classes with transportation and childcare for pregnant and parenting at-risk families in **Delaware County.**

### **Economic Opportunity Council of Suffolk, Inc.**

Teens As Parents is an innovative school-based prenatal and parent education program that offers doula support and home-visiting services to teens in **Suffolk County.**

### **LSA Family Health Service**

The Maternity Outreach Program provides in-home nursing visits, along with maternal and infant healthcare education, to high-risk new mothers and their infants in **East Harlem.**

### **MOMMAS, Inc.**

The MOMMAS House Mother-Child Transitional Housing Program provides stable and/or emergency housing, along with parent education workshops, to at-risk women and their children in the **Greater New York Area.**

### **Oswego County Opportunities, Inc.**

OPTIONS provides crisis intervention, case management, parent education, and support to pregnant and parenting teens in **Oswego County.**

### **Society for the Protection and Care of Children**

Teenage Parent Support Services: Reaching Young Parents Early provides home-based education and services, as well as connections to needed services, to pregnant women and parents up to age 22 in the **City of Rochester and Monroe County.**

### **YWCA of Jamestown**

The Teenage Education and Motherhood Program provides daily parenting classes, childcare during school, and case management to pregnant and parenting students in **Chautauqua County.**