



Maternity & Early Childhood Foundation

Supporting expectant and new parents will last a lifetime!

Testimony to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee

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Joy Griffith

Executive Director

Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation, Inc.

40 North Main Avenue

Albany, New York 12203

518-482-0038

www.mecfny.org

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the families we serve, the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation, Inc. thanks you for supporting an economical and highly effective 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 (MECF).** Without your support, we face extinction because the 2017-18 Executive State Budget eliminates funding for MECF. We look to you to continue what you have done for the past 30 years, protect the underserved young families and their babies living in extreme poverty in your communities and give them a chance to be all that they can be. To ensure young parents and their infants receive these vital services, **please restore the line item in the 2017-18 State Health Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation to last year's funding level of \$593,300, and, if possible, increase the appropriation to \$1 million to address the unmet need facing young parents around New York State.**

BACKGROUND

The Maternity and 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 nurture healthy parents, healthy babies, and positive parenting, making a lifetime of difference to the families we serve. Our mission is to ensure a safe and healthy birth of the child and the well-being of the mother by supporting and promoting services to those families who are most in need.

The New York State Budget has long supported the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation. MECF is a not for profit agency that was started more than 30 years ago 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.

Thanks to your support, MECF received \$593,300 in the 2016-17 enacted State Budget. With those funds, we supported services in 19 high need communities supporting services in 22 counties across New York State where other community services are often limited or nonexistent. Through December 2016, close to 2,000 pregnant and parenting women and their family members were served.

NEED FOR SERVICES

The needs of young parents in New York State are vast and urgent:

- **One in four children in New York State live in poverty. In many urban areas, the rate is much higher!**
- **Over 10,000 teens gave birth in 2014; 99% of them had not completed high school.**
- **There is increasing concern throughout NYS about the number of teens who are addicted to prescription drugs and to opiates, and how that affects their infants.**
- **A baby suffering from opiate withdrawal is born every 25 minutes.**
- **The Center for Disease Control recently released a study indicating that heroin overdose deaths increased 28.6% in NYS from 2014-15. Most of the incidence of drug use and drug related deaths are to women and men under the age of 25.**
- **The New York State maternal mortality rate is twice the national rate.**
- **The New York State low birth weight (LBW) rate is 8.2% and very low birth weight (VLBW) rate is 1.5%. The rate of LBW for Black non-Hispanic women is 13%.**
- **The New York State 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 and impoverished population.**

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 **50%** of parents enroll in the program prenatally - the best time to make a positive impact on health for the baby and mother. **46% 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 birth weight 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. **There is increasing concern about the incidence of pregnant teens addicted to drugs and the impact on newborn babies.**

The Maternity and Early Childhood 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 (CMS)**, a MECF funded program located in 6 counties in rural upstate New York. When the program started working with her, the Mom was a pregnant teenager enrolled in high school. She spoke eloquently at the MECF Fall Luncheon held last October. She brought her two year old son with her. The mom works part-time at a local hospital, and is enrolled in college, where she has maintained a 3.8 GPA in the Liberal Arts Pre-Nursing Program. She hopes to attend nursing school to become a pediatric nurse. The mom said, **“Being a mom is a lot of work but it’s very rewarding and I wouldn’t trade it for anything!”** She’s been thrilled to work with her CMS caseworker who is a huge support and has given her someone to talk to, while also learning about how to care for her baby.

Community Maternity Services (CMS) provides in-home services for low income isolated pregnant and parenting teens living in rural **Schoharie, Otsego, Fulton, Montgomery, Warren and Washington counties**. The staff connects the young parents with prenatal care and health insurance. They teach mothers infant safety and positive parenting. They promote healthy life styles, including smoking cessation, and encourage the Moms and Dads to finish school. Staff provide an invaluable support to many young parents who otherwise would not know where to turn for help.

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** 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. The **YWCA of Jamestown** supports the TEAM program that provides parenting education and encourages the teen moms finish high school. **MOMMA’s House and Catholic Charities of Rockville Centre on Long Island** 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 pregnant and parenting immigrants who do not have access to necessary services. Similar programs are provided in **Buffalo, Rochester** and other upstate rural communities. A list of funded programs and the services provided is attached.

OUR IMPACT

We recognize that the state must do business differently. We believe that we are doing just that by 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 foster care and Medicaid costs. The cost of providing services before a 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. 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 move 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 line item in the 2017-18 State Health Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation to last year's funding level of \$593,300, and, if funding permits, a modest increase to \$1 million to address the serious unmet need of young parents. We are counting on you to keep our most vulnerable citizens, our children and their struggling families among your priorities. An increase in funding will allow the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation to support services in high need communities across New York State serving at least 3,000 low income pregnant and parenting women and their children. After years of drastic funding cuts, an 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 up 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 consideration of this request. Together we can build strong families and break the cycle of poverty.

**MATERNITY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION
2016-17 GRANTS**

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