

**Testimony of
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**Wednesday, April 21, 2010
11:00-12:00
COMMITTEE ON AGING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
District of Columbia
City Council**

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.