

**Testimony of
Maria S. Gómez, R.N., M.P.H.
President/CEO
Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care, Inc.
For The
COMMITTEE ON AGING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS – Office on Latino Affairs
CHAIRPERSON YVETTE M. ALEXANDER
APRIL 21, 2010**

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.