



New York State Catholic Conference

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Testimony
of the
New York State Catholic Conference
regarding the
2021 – 2022
Health Budget

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing: Health
Statement in Support of
the Maternity & Early Childhood Foundation

Submitted by:
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The New York State Catholic Conference urges the restoration of funding for the Maternity & Early Childhood Foundation (MECF), a statewide not-for-profit organization which provides grants to community-based programs serving low-income pregnant and parenting moms. MECF has been supported in the NYS Budget every year since 1983, but tragically, this year the Executive Budget proposes to eliminate all of the Foundation's funding, which would be harmful to the programs and devastating to the families served.

MECF supports community programs in areas of our state where resources are limited or non-existent, providing services such as home visits, crisis intervention, parenting education, referrals and connections to social services, housing, mental health care and WIC. During the coronavirus pandemic, some of these programs supply a crucial lifeline for young families in poverty, providing necessities like food, clothing, diapers and formula.

MECF grantees address the broad range of the social, physical and economic conditions that impact health, working to create a climate that is supportive of new and expectant parents and their small children. Many young women served by MECF programs are women of color, undocumented, poor, at risk of violence, and living in underserved communities.

In the SFY 2019-2020 budget, MECF was allotted a total of \$427,000 and was able to fund 16 community-based programs throughout the state. But looking ahead, the Foundation now finds itself in a fiscally tenuous condition, facing deep reductions and long delays in the monies it is owed, further cutbacks dependent on federal aid, and the prospect of zero funding for programs in the coming fiscal year.

At this time of unprecedented economic angst for so many New Yorkers, we are not unaware of the herculean task before you in crafting the state's upcoming budget. We ask you to consider, however, that by focusing on the social determinants of health, MECF-funded programs promote early prenatal care, prevention/early intervention services, and healthy lifestyles, thus improving overall maternal and child health outcomes and reducing higher health care costs in both the short- and long-term.

Social justice has always required us, as a faith-based organization, to advocate for policies and programs favorable to raising a child, and this we have consistently done, supporting greater health care access, subsidized child care, paid parental leave and other measures which empower women and enable their children to thrive. Our support for MECF is part and parcel of this commitment to justice and human rights.

Pope Francis has said that we cannot ignore the poor and the marginalized or we will become "deadened" to their cries. Rather, he calls us to build a culture of encounter, hospitality, and support for the dignity of each person and the common good.

As you deliberate and design the SFY 2021-2022 state budget, we urge you to hear the cries of vulnerable young mothers and their children and to make their needs a priority and an essential element of your decisions. We strongly urge restoration of funding for the Maternity & Early Childhood Foundation. Thank you for your consideration of restoring this critical funding.