



Parents as Teachers®

**Testimony before the
New York State
Joint Fiscal Committees
SFY 2020-2021 State Budget
Human Services Budget Hearing
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Testimony Submitted by:

**Dr. Myra Henry, President and CEO
YWCA Rochester and Monroe County
mhenry@ywcarochester.org**

I would like to thank the chairs and members of the committees for the opportunity to submit testimony on the 2021-2022 New York State Budget.

My name is Dr. Myra Henry and I am the President and CEO of YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County. Our mission is to eliminate racism and empower women through housing and young adult services. Just as YOU cannot build a house without a strong foundation, WE believe we cannot help to build a stronger Rochester community without a foundation of empowered families.

I am here today to share with you two main points:

1. The critical impact the YWCA Parents as Teachers program has on the families we serve.
2. How reinstating the Public Private Partnership will help build the stronger Rochester we all deserve.

Point 1- Impact on those we serve:

Our community has the 3rd highest rate of childhood poverty in the country. The YWCA Parents as Teachers program is one program in our community's tool kit that demonstrates proven success in diminishing the devastating effects of poverty on those we serve. We find it unconscionable that programs specifically designed to combat the effects of poverty for children have been lost to other funding priorities.

As I look at the committee today, I know that many of you are parents. And like you, the families in our program want to be the best parents they can be. All parents face a mountain of challenges that can make pregnancy and early parenting a very stressful time. This stress is only compounded for our young families who are also trying to navigate poverty, their own education and employment as well as, for many, systemic barriers built on years of institutionalized racism.

Thanks, in part, to a Public Private Partnership grant administered by the state's Office of Children and Families, YWCA Parents as Teachers home visitors build trusting relationships with mothers and fathers, to help ensure that parents and babies are safe and healthy. Our philosophy is that parents are the experts in their own lives and in the lives of their children and our staff is there to provide support and guidance. We provide health and developmental screenings and post-partum depression screenings for new mothers. We are there in times of crisis and for the long term to assist with mental health concerns, domestic violence and housing instability.

Our program also offers group learning and social connections, and referrals to critical services that meet the individual needs of families forced to navigate our state's complex systems of care.

Point 2: Parents as Teachers a Community Change Agent

I imagine that as policymakers and budget writers you feel more confident in knowing with a high degree of certainty that grant funded programs ultimately lead to better statewide outcomes. With Parents as Teachers, you can be certain that your investment has proven success

metrics. Let me share with you some findings from research published in the past 24 months.

- On a sample of almost 8,000 families enrolled in Parents as Teachers, there was a 22% decreased likelihood of child maltreatment substantiations (as measured by Child Protective Services maltreatment data) compared to non-Parents as Teachers families (Chaiyachati et. al 2018).
- And just two months ago, a novel study in one of the largest longitudinal intervention studies on home visiting with a randomized controlled study design demonstrated that Parents as Teachers has lasting biological/DNA benefits that prevent mental health concerns in children. (Gardini, Eet. Al 2020).

Data such as this emphasizes the importance of the PAT, not only for participants, but on the long- term health of our community in the prevention of abuse and the decrease in mental illness.

In closing, the elimination of the Public Private Partnership grant at OCFS, placed a significant financial strain on our agency and on our families. We are being asked to do more with so much less.

But, it isn't really about the 14 programs here in NY State that can no longer provide for their communities due to this funding loss, is it? It is about the thousands of children and their parents who are losing the support they need for both survival and success. As you already know, the populations hit hardest by the pandemic are the primary populations served by home visiting—low-income women and families of color. Can we agree that now is NOT the time to decrease these essential services for these vulnerable populations? Can we agree that children and families in Rochester, especially children and families of color, deserve better?

I respectfully urge this committee to please to restore the Public Private Partnership grant so that we can continue to support Rochester's families with Parents as Teachers home visiting among the many other well-proven programs funded by this grant.

For your information and for the record, I have provided the clerk a written copy of this testimony, and request they be included in the hearing record. I welcome your questions.

Thank you.

Citations

Gardini, E., Schaub, S., Neuhauser, A., Ramseier, E., Villiger, A., Ehlert, U., . . . Turecki, G. (2020). Methylation of the glucocorticoid receptor promoter in children: Links with parents as teachers, early life stress, and behavior problems. *Development and Psychopathology*, 1-13. doi:10.1017/S0954579420001984.

Barbara H. Chaiyachati, Julie R. Gaither, Marcia Hughes, Karen Foley-Schain, John M. Leventhal, Preventing child maltreatment: Examination of an established statewide home-visiting program, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Volume 79, 2018, Pages 476-484, ISSN 0145-2134, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.02.019>.