



# Maternity & Early Childhood Foundation

*Supporting expectant and new parents will last a lifetime!*

Testimony to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee

February 12, 2018



Molly Johnston-Heck

Interim Executive Director

Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation, Inc.

40 North Main Avenue

Albany, New York 12203

518-482-0038

[www.mecfny.org](http://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 2018-19 Executive State Budget eliminates funding for MECF. We look to you to continue what you have done for the past 35 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 2018-19 State Health Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation to last year's funding level of \$417,000.**

## **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 \$327,000 in the 2017-18 enacted State Budget and an additional legislative award of \$90,000, totaling \$417,000 in State funds. With those funds, we supported services in 16 high need communities in 18 counties across New York State where other community services are often limited or nonexistent. Through December 2017, over 600 pregnant and parenting women and their family members received vital support from these community based programs.**

## **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!**
- **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.**
- **While the low birth weight (LBW) rate in New York State has decreased since 2008, the rates for Black women and other minorities are well above the average, indicating significant racial disparities in health.**

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. One third of women 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 4 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, 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. 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 Corona, Queens** provide nursing services, case management, and group parent education to low income pregnant and parenting immigrants who do not have access to necessary services and are isolated due to cultural factors. In many rural upstate counties like **Franklin County, Schoharie County, and Livingston County**, programs provide in-home parent support and education. A list of funded programs and the services provided is attached.

## ***OUR IMPACT***

We believe that the goals and actions of MECF and our funded programs align directly with the goals of the New York State Department of Health. MECF programs provide crucial services to low-income young families at the time of birth and in the first few years of life, which is addressed by the Department of Health’s “First 1000 days on Medicaid” initiative. Our programs are working directly with the populations that DOH hopes to reach in this new endeavor. In fact, MECF funded services reduce Medicaid costs by reducing the risk of low birth weight and other poor health outcomes for mother and baby. MECF is also committed to reducing Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID). MECF programs provide education and support to families to encourage safe sleep practices and reduce infant mortality.

Our programs give participants the tools they need to feel confident as parents and provide a safe, nurturing environment for their children. 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 is a cost-efficient and accountable program that saves local and state government financial resources over the long-term. Many of the parents served by MECF have little or no support, and rely on MECF programs for information, encouragement, and supplies in order 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 2018-19 New York State Department of Health Budget for the Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation to last year's total funding level of \$417,000. We are counting on you to keep our most vulnerable citizens – our children and their struggling families – among your priorities. After years of drastic funding cuts, MECF and the families we serve cannot afford a further reduction in funding.

As you reflect on how to invest state funds, please consider that the best returns will clearly 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  
2017-18 GRANTS**

<b>Agency/Program</b>	<b>Target Area</b>	<b>Services Provided</b>
Catholic Charities of Buffalo <i>Young Parents Program</i>	Buffalo, Erie County	Parent Education, Home Visiting Services
Catholic Charities of Franklin County <i>Parenting Support</i>	Franklin County	In-home Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens
Catholic Charities Livingston <i>Community of Caring</i>	Livingston County	In-home Parent Education, mentoring
Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services <i>Casa de Apoyo &amp; Mommy and Me</i>	Corona and Astoria, Queens	Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Immigrant Women
Catholic Charities of Onondaga County <i>Lullaby League</i>	Syracuse, Onondaga County	Parent Education for Pregnant Teens
Catholic Charities of Rockville Centre <i>Regina Maternity Services</i>	Nassau County	Mentoring and Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens
Community Maternity Services of Schoharie/Otsego Counties <i>Parenting Support</i>	Schoharie and Otsego Counties	In-Home Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens
Community Maternity Services of Warren/Washington Counties <i>Parenting Support</i>	Warren and Washington Counties	In-Home Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County <i>Strengthening Family Foundations</i>	Jefferson and Lewis Counties	Parent Education, Home Visiting Services
Delaware Opportunities Inc. <i>Better Beginnings</i>	Delaware County	Group Parent Education for Low Income Young Parents
Economic Opportunity Council, Inc. <i>Teens as Parents</i>	Suffolk County	Parent education for pregnant and parenting teens.
Little Sisters of the Assumption <i>Maternity Outreach Program</i>	East Harlem	In-Home Health Visits, Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Immigrant Women
MOMMA'S Inc. <i>MOMMAS House</i>	Nassau and Suffolk Counties	Parent Education for Homeless Pregnant and Parenting Teens
Oswego County Opportunities <i>OPTIONS</i>	Oswego County	Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens
Society for the Protection and Care of Children <i>Reaching Young Parents</i>	City of Rochester, Monroe County	Transitional Support (Crisis Intervention & PAT) for Parenting Teens
YWCA of Jamestown <i>Teenage Education and Motherhood</i>	Chautauqua County	In-home Parent Education for Pregnant and Parenting Teens