
**Testimony IN SUPPORT of HB 838
Prince George's County Family Childcare Home Expansion Grant Program
Ways and Means Committee
February 12, 2024**

Dear Honorable Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing La Clínica Del Pueblo to come before your committee. We request a favorable report on HB 838-Family Childcare Home Expansion Grant Program. My name is Britney Padilla. I am a Youth Development Worker at our school-based mental health Program called Mi Refugio, from La Clínica del Pueblo. In my job, I support Mi Refugio, engage in community outreach, act as a client advocate, and collaborate with school faculty on the needs of students and their families.

La Clínica del Pueblo opened 40 years ago to provide preventative healthcare to newly arrived immigrants. In these years of operation, we have expanded our services to Prince George's County. We have been a strong voice for immigrants through our leadership and their presence in our organization. We see approximately 2,000 immigrants in Prince George's County and focus on providing primary care, mental health, and community outreach programs.

Mi Refugio is a school-based mental health program within Northwestern High School that provides mental health, college preparation, and positive youth development programming. Over the years, we have seen a rise in teen pregnancy within this high school, and our County. La Clínica assists these young mothers by providing services for their children and prenatal care. Nonetheless, these young students must drop out of school due to a lack of a support system to provide for their young children. This maintains the cycle of poverty, relegating these young women to an early work environment that does not allow them to grow professionally.

Consider the case of one of our current students, a 17-year-old in 10th grade who is currently 37 weeks pregnant. Despite her academic commitment, she faces a significant dilemma as she is entitled to only 8 weeks off school. Returning to school does not look like an option for her because both of her parent's work, and she does not have anyone who can take care of her baby. Unfortunately, she represents a common scenario where students are compelled to abandon their education due to the lack of support with their children.

This bill will enable childcare centers to receive early childhood education training, enhance safety and environments and support with legal requirements. It will serve as a crucial step towards creating a supportive environment that enables students to continue their education without compromising their responsibilities as parents. By supporting home-based childcare providers, the county will enhance early childhood education and support women's economic independence and professional growth.

Our county has a teen pregnancy rate for Black and Hispanic women that is above the average of the state. These childcare centers would allow these young parents to attend school, complete their education, and have better economic and workforce opportunities for themselves and their families.

La Clínica del Pueblo recognizes the need for accessible and quality childcare in our community. This initiative aligns seamlessly with our mission, promising a stronger, healthier, more resilient community where every family has the support they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

Britney Padilla.