

March 30, 2021

Dear Council members,

My name is Lucy Absi Lopez, and I am a Family Support Specialist from the Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. I have been working in this capacity since 2015.

I would like to present to you Maria's case for you to see the need of funding to local non-profit organizations to support families whose children are struggling in the school.

Maria emigrated from Guatemala 10 years ago and now works as a housecleaner in Montgomery County. Maria's son, Juan has been struggling in school. Maria has been unable to help her son since she does not speak English or understands the educational system. Maria works long hours and never received formal education in her native country. Maria is starting to learn the benefits of formal education in people's lives. Juan is struggling in middle school and school seems to be getting harder every day. Maria has tried to get assistance for her son at school. The remote learning has made matters worse. When engaging in remote learning, Juan gets easily frustrated and discouraged and does not seem to grasp what he is supposed to be learning.

Statistics have shown that a high percentage of children drop out of school when they struggle academically and do not think they will have the grade point average and the credits necessary to graduate.

Dropping out of school has serious consequences for students, their families, and the entire society. Students who decide to drop out of school will face fewer job opportunities, lower salaries and higher incidence of involvement with the criminal justice system.

As a Family Support Partner I have been faced with multiple situations like this. Maria's case is not unique in this part of the country where we have a larger number of immigrants.

I really want to help Maria and Juan and many others in the same situation by advocating for them. I would let the school know that I am available to help parents whose children are struggling in school. I would ask the school to tell parents whose children are having difficulties academically that they can receive individualized support from a Family Peer Support Specialist. I would focus my efforts on parents of elementary school children who are beginning to show signs that they are having difficulties in school. The sooner the problem is identified, the greater the chances are to close the gap and prevent children from falling behind in school.

When children first show signs that they are having difficulties in school, parents should be linked to organizations that can help them understand the educational system and the benefits for their children to graduate from high school so that they will have better opportunities in the job market and in their lives. In addition, children should be placed with tutors and academic therapists who will assist them learn the subjects they are studying in school. Children also should be linked to mentors who will serve

as positive role models. These mentors will play an essential part in a child's positive development. They will inspire their mentees and imbue them with hope and determination.

The State of Maryland, local jurisdictions, and foundations should offer more grants to grassroots organizations to provide these types of services. Moreover, there needs to be strong partnerships between schools and local non-profit organizations, coupled with an infusion of funding targeted at assisting children who are struggling academically and supporting their parents.

Thank you for reading my testimony,

Sincerely

Lucy Absi Lopez

Family Support Specialist

Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health