

**STATEMENT OF  
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**BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES**

**MARCH 15, 2017**

Good afternoon Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Davis, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program in support of evidence-based home visiting and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program.

My name is Rosa Valentin, and I am a client with the Nurse-Family Partnership program delivered by Lancaster General Health/Penn Medicine in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I am the incredibly proud mother of my daughter, Angelica, who is 20 months old and here with me today. As a client, I have received regular visits about every other week from my NFP Nurse Home Visitor, Beth Russell, starting when I was just four months pregnant.

I am here on behalf of the mothers, children, and families like us that benefit from the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program. I am honored to be here today to thank Chairman Smith and the Members of this Subcommittee in person for their commitment to improving the health and well-being of children with dedicated funding for evidence-based home visiting programs. This program has meant so much to me and my family, and I know that if every Nurse-Family Partnership mom could be here today to talk about their experience, they would be, because it is truly a life changing experience to be part of this program.

I am 16-years old I and have lived in Lancaster my entire life with my mother and father. Two years ago, when I was 14-years old, I found out I was pregnant with Angelica. I was in shock. I was in denial. I was scared, sad, disappointed; all I thought about was, "What am I going to tell my mother?" Thankfully, my mom was supportive of my decisions to have the baby. And from the minute I saw her arms, legs, and fluttering heartbeat I knew that I wanted to protect her from any harm and do what was best for her.

I heard about the Nurse-Family Partnership program through my doctor's office. Because I was a first-time mom and met the other eligibility requirements, they referred me to Lancaster's NFP program and Beth. We set up an appointment for Beth to come to my home and talk more about the program. I was shy at first, but Beth helped me to start thinking about my goals and programs that were available to help me as a teenager. I started to look forward to our visits.

Up until the point where I got pregnant, I had taken care of my little cousins as babies, but that was about it. On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 at 2:39 p.m., my life changed. My baby girl was born weighing 6lbs, 3oz, and measuring 19 ½ inches long. She had jet-black hair and black eyes. Now I had a lot to learn about taking care of my own baby, not to mention navigating my own personal challenges. I had experienced a lot of disrespect from my peers about my pregnancy and although my Mom and Dad have always been there for me, I didn't have the support of my entire family. And although I initially expected Angelica's father to be a part of raising her, and I thought we would be together as a family to experience her milestones, ultimately he was not in the picture. This was very difficult for me and I needed to move past that in order to take care of my baby and reach my goals.

Beth helped me do just that. She has been there for me emotionally, sometimes just as a listening ear for venting, or to provide suggestions on dealing with stressful situations so that I can get back to being the mom I needed and wanted to be.

Angelica is the love of my life. After I brought my baby girl home, it seemed like all I wanted to do was spend time with her and there was so much to learn about how to take care of a baby. Beth showed me how to bathe her for the first time, and answered all of my questions about what was going on with my baby. It was difficult to keep up as a new mom. I was still a student high school and started to fall behind on my online classes. Beth helped me not to lose sight of my goals for school. She helped me to develop a routine for my daughter and find time for myself to study. It was exhausting taking care of a new baby, but Beth helped me to stay focused.

I want to go to vocational school next year, and Beth has helped me to always keep that goal in sight. “This is what you wanted for yourself,” she reminds me. I will go to college.

Beth also helped me find programs to support my parenting and educational goals—like Teen Elect and A Woman’s Concern—and stick with them. When I initially questioned how long I could stick with breastfeeding, she encouraged me to set goals and do what I felt was right. My initial goal was six months, and today, I am still nursing my 20-month-old daughter, although trying to wean!

Like every new mom, I have had concerns, and Beth has been there to help me address them. Beth has also been a resource for my mom, who usually is involved with our home visits because she helps me take care of Angelica, and is helping me achieve my goals. It has meant so much to me to have a nurse at my side, someone who I could trust for advice when was experiencing round ligament pain late in my pregnancy and was concerned about the baby, or had cramping while breastfeeding. Beth was also very helpful when I was worried about Angelica’s weight because others thought she was too small or if she was learning things at the right pace. Beth was always able to reassure me that Angelica was growing well and passing her developmental screenings. She also helped me understand birth control options after pregnancy, and when I was under a lot of stress, and needed counseling, Beth helped me understand why it was important to talk to someone.

Beth also encouraged me to think about the type of parent that I wanted to be. I thought about people who are parents in my life—some are too strict, some have no rules at all—and thought about what I thought was the best approach. I’ve decided I want both—rules, but not too many. What I think is important for me to provide for Angelica is consistency. I am trying to follow the “Four C’s of parenting” (choices, consequences, consistency, and care) and use encouraging words that help her realize what to do instead of what not to do. These concepts are all so important for me as my baby grows into a toddler. Every day I am so excited for all the new things she is learning and showing me. She loves to look at books and point out things; she loves to play and she is very smart. We love to read together, and I know that I am doing the right things for her. Angelica makes me happy every day, and I am so proud to see how much she has learned and how much she has grown.

When I found out I was pregnant, I was a freshman in high school. Now, here I am with a beautiful blue-eyed 20 month-old little girl, looking forward to my senior year in the Career and Technical Center’s vocational program for Cosmetology. After I graduate I would like to go on to college and graduate school and have a career as a Perinatal Nurse.

I know that I am a better mom today because of this program and Beth. It's been really special to look back at what I have done while I have been in the NFP program. I feel like so much has changed since I first began, and it is encouraging for me to see how far I have come. Nurse-Family Partnership really gave me the opportunity to be a good parent, and this gives me a proud feeling every day. If it was possible, I would appreciate the program extending to 3 years! Beth has been so helpful and I wish she didn't have to go after the 2 years. I don't know what it must be like to be a teen mom without this support, and I know there are so many more new moms just like me who are in need of it. Having a nurse like Beth, who I could trust with questions about my health when I was pregnant, breastfeeding when I was a new mom, child development as she grows, and life goals – helped me to be a successful parent.

Even though being a mom at times isn't easy, Angelica is my motivation to do better, finish school, and have a career. I am lucky to say that I had the support to help me along the way. I would certainly refer a friend to the NFP program because of all the opportunities and benefits that come with the program. NFP is the best program that anyone could have; having a nurse by your side through every step of the way to reassure you that you are not alone is something that every first time mom needs to hear.

I truly hope that Congress will continue supporting the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, which supports great programs like Nurse-Family Partnership. Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Davis, and the Members of this Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today.