

DC's Home Visiting Programs Under Threat Without Federal Reauthorization

By Jodi Kwarciany

A critical program for DC families with young children will soon be in jeopardy because federal funding has not been reauthorized. If federal funding goes away, DC should fill in with local funding to avoid having to freeze enrollment or eliminate services altogether.

The Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV) supports services, primarily in a home environment, to improve outcomes for pregnant women and parents with young children who are low income or face other risks. Home visitors help parents create a safe and healthy home environment; teach skills like nutrition, stress management or child development; and refer families to community resources. This leads to children who are healthier and more likely to start school on the right foot, and it improves parental health and family economic self-sufficiency as well.

Effective home visiting programs work. Every \$1 invested in home visiting programs leads to a \$3 to \$5 return to society, according to the [Center for American Progress \(CAP\)](#).



The District uses MIECHV funds to support evidence-based home visiting models, like [Healthy Families America](#) and [Parents as Teachers](#), which are proven to improve infant health and be cost-effective. In FY 2016, home visitors made [4,665 visits to nearly 400 DC families](#). DC's home visiting programs screened 94 percent of women participating in the program for substance use. They've also screened 91 percent of enrolled postpartum women for pre-conception care within three months, which helps promote healthy future pregnancies.

MIECHV began as a small pilot program under President George W. Bush, but was later expanded under the Affordable Care Act of 2010. It has enjoyed widespread bipartisan support, including funding extensions through 2017. But this year, MIECHV expired on September 30 when Congress failed to reauthorize it. The Senate has a bill that reauthorizes the program through 2022 with no increase in funding, while a House bill would increase program funding if states can match the funds.

Without MIECHV, the majority of public funding for home visiting in DC would be lost, according to DC Action for Children, a local non-profit dedicated to improving child well-being. That means DC families may lose access to a critical program with proven outcomes, impacting the hundreds of families that currently rely on it or would benefit from it in the future.

Congress shouldn't delay in reauthorizing this proven and cost-effective program. Yet if it does, it's on the District to provide the local funds needed to sustain services – and support at-risk families.