

## Opening Statement Martha Martinez, Elgin Area Pandemic Assistance Team

Subcommittee Hearing: Coronavirus Crisis

Topic: Building Vaccine Confidence: Our Shot at Curbing the Pandemic in Chicago and Beyond

Hi. I am Martha Martinez. I supervise the Elgin Area Pandemic Assistance Team out of the Gail Borden Public Library in downtown Elgin. My team consists of 4 people, Anamaria Mora, Chas Sirridge, Luz Purcell and Sue Tuominen. We are part of the Illinois Pandemic Health Navigator Program funded through a grant by the Illinois Department of Public Health and administered by the Illinois Public Health Association.

We are charged with helping those that have been impacted by COVID, specifically the underserved. That might be the elderly or others who lack internet access, a computer or smart device. We work in a very diverse community in Elgin, with significant brown populations. Clients are relieved when they can speak to us in Spanish. We also serve the houseless community who visit the library regularly. All the above are residents in need of assistance.

We partner with the local Health Department to work with COVID positive patients who may need services while under quarantine. We provide food deliveries, as well as disinfectants, diapers, and even dog food.

We can be reached in several ways. We have a published number for people to call us. We have an email address and a web page. We staff a table in the library lobby for those that prefer to walk-in and talk to someone directly. Many are looking for financial assistance and we help to connect them to community-based organizations that have funding for such requests.

Early in the year when vaccine appointments were hard to come by, we assisted in scheduling hundreds of appointments. As the vaccine requests dwindled, we moved to outreach work by participating in local events and making our community aware of our services. We have also hosted many vaccine clinics at the library. We have one this Saturday offering the boosters and new children's vaccine.

We have helped with lost vaccine cards, answered questions about the vaccine and now the boosters. Our availability via multiple channels has allowed us to keep up with the pulse of the community, both vaccinated and not.

Gail Borden Public Library is a trusted entity in our community. People know to come there as the library staff is great at helping. Our Pandemic team fell right into place. We take a non-judgmental approach with our clients and try to match them with the services that they need.

Through familiarity with our daily presence, we too have become trusted advisors. We continue to promote vaccination in a respectful, non-confrontational manner. We have had many clients stop-by to thank us for our help.

I will share some experiences with you:

1. We helped an 85-year-old man living by himself, who sought an appointment for a COVID test. Most appointments are scheduled online, and he was challenged as he did not know how to use a computer or smart device. We made his appointment close home. We took a picture of the appointment ticket. He didn't use email, but he knew how to access texting. We sent him the details. He was incredibly thankful for the assistance.

2. We had a family of 8 who contacted us at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour for help. They were desperate as they were facing eviction that week. We worked closely with them to secure funding to get them back on track with their rental payments. They, too, were so happy to be able to stay in their home.

3. Our team members have driven through tornadic winds to deliver medications. They have walked victims of abuse to the Crisis Center. They have secured temporary shelter for a client whose utilities were turned off amid a heat wave. They have delivered food to families with empty cupboards, and they were welcomed by children peering through the window whose faces lit up when they caught a glimpse of the ice cream bars.

We know we have helped many people negatively impacted by COVID. We hope to continue with this work. Special thanks to Denise Raleigh and her team at the library for all their support throughout this project. Thank you!