

TESTIMONY OF ERICA BECK

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HENRY BOOTH HOUSE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKER & FAMILY SUPPORT

“IMPROVING FAMILY OUTCOMES THROUGH HOME VISITING”

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Good morning, Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Walorski, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Erica Beck, a Parent Participant with the Healthy Families America program at the Henry Booth House. I am honored to have this opportunity to share my story with you.

I've been participating in the Healthy Families America program for the past 3 years with my youngest son, Calais. My husband, Louis, is with me here today and is also a big fan of the program. He wants a Dad's group in the home visiting program!

I met Myia one day while in the WIC office when I was pregnant with Calais. Myia came up to me and introduced herself. I recognized her. She had gone to my high school but was a little older. She asked me how I was doing with my pregnancy, and we talked. Then she told me about the program. At first, I thought “this is just another program,” but then she explained how it worked. She encouraged me to try it and said that I could leave at any time if I wanted to.

I wasn't sure, but I got something from Myia that just made me feel comfortable. Plus, she was from my community, my high school. When I told Louis, he was hesitant at first. He wondered why we'd let someone we didn't know into our house. But once Myia came to visit us, I could see the benefit of the program. Louis agreed and wanted to be involved.

The first visit with Myia was a couple months before I gave birth. I had a difficult birth with preeclampsia and was in the hospital for a week. Myia called and came by to check on me. I don't have a family that supports me so it meant a lot to have someone to rely on. I knew she really cared and would be there for me.

This program has supported me and my family in so many ways. Myia comes to my home and meets with me regularly. She gives me structure. At the beginning, Myia asked me to think about a family goal plan. Some of the goals I've set are to lose weight and go back to school. There is a local housing program that we want to enroll in. Myia is helping us look for good, safe neighborhoods, and helping us with money management. You need to have \$6000 and a credit score of 660. Now I'm not worried about my credit score, and we're saving towards the down payment! She's helped me put steps in place to achieve all my goals, and now she helps me stay on track or get back on track. She encourages me all along the way.

Myia helps me with Calais. She provided me with a breast pump after he was born. If not for Myia, I wouldn't have breastfed him. She helps make sure he's on track and we get to his well-child visits. She does the Ages and Stages developmental Questionnaire with him, and I take it to his doctor to show him the progress he has made. Calais even walked at 9 months! Myia brings him books that I read to him, we practice coloring and numbers. He's almost 3 now and recently moved into a higher class in his preschool because he was so advanced and was just Student of the Month! She is helping our kids do better in school because we are boosting their education needs at home, not just at school.

Myia also helped us through tough times when Calais was younger. Around 6 months old, one of his kidneys wasn't working as well as the other one. Like any mom, I thought I had done something wrong. Myia helped me understand that I hadn't, and that working with the doctor, Calais would be fine. She helped me focus on getting him better.

Myia helps us with things in our everyday life. She made sure I didn't miss WIC appointments after Calais was born. She brought diapers when we were working less during Covid. I was sad that she couldn't visit, but she continued to support us through texts, phone and video.

One thing I love is that Myia has a group text with moms. She uses it to encourage us to take care of ourselves. Some of the parents, like me, are in two parent households, but others are single moms. Parents need to take time for themselves. I think child abuse or neglect can happen when parents don't do that. Myia reminds us to focus on self-care.

A few things that stand out about why the Healthy Families America program really works for me. Myia schedules things so they fit around our work schedule. I work at USPS, and it is so important to be flexible if you want parents to keep working and participate in a program. She involves my whole family. Louis and I have 5 children, 4 boys and one girl. Myia works with me and my youngest, but she also built a relationship with Louis and my older kids. She lets Louis know how he can support me and how he can help the kids. I think every program should involve the whole family.

I also think it's important that Myia says "I'm proud of you. I'm proud of the kids." Not everyone has family that does that for them. She makes people feel love, because a lot of the time they don't have that. Myia, and all of the HFA team at Henry Booth, are there with us, encouraging us, all along the way.

When I think about what this program has done for me and my family, Calais is child number 5, but we still learned a lot of things that we never knew, it really is about the education you get from this program.

I know that our lives are changed forever and for the better because of Myia. She is helping me and Louis help our kids succeed. She is helping our kids do better in school because we are boosting their education needs at home, not just at school. And she's educating all of us. She is helping me complete my goals, which is better for the whole family. I can see myself back at school and owning a home.

I would tell any parent thinking about HFA to try it out. I know that our lives are changed forever and for the better because of Myia. She is helping me and Louis help our kids succeed. For parents – moms or dads - that want and need this kind of support, it should be there for them. In the end, it's not about any concrete things they give you, it's about the education and support that people like Myia provide. That is what changes everything.