

**Dennis Hillian**  
**Testimony before Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Children and Families**  
**June 9, 2011**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Subcommittee on Children and Families. I am Dennis Hillian, a Family Service Coordinator at the Charles County, Maryland, Judy Center.

Judy Centers are named for the late Judith P. Hoyer, a life-long advocate for quality early education and comprehensive family support services. There are 25 Judy Centers in the State of Maryland. Two are in Charles County.

We work with children age birth through kindergarten, and their low-income families to ensure they enter school ready to learn. Much of our work is accomplished through a collaborative community partnership of agencies, local organizations, and businesses. There is no issue a child or family may have that we cannot address through our partnership.

We assist with ensuring children are enrolled in high-quality accredited early education programs, including child care; we offer mental health and behavior services; dental services; hearing and vision screenings; and tutoring for children. Additionally, we equip our families with the tools they need to be effective and engaged as their child's first teacher. Families participate in family nights that always include educational components; parenting workshops; and Adult Education classes.

Our data shows that children with the Judy Center experience enter kindergarten better prepared than children who did not have the experience.

I would like to share with you a couple of personal success stories.

1. Back in 2008, we discovered a dad who had lost his job and mom who was only working part-time. They couldn't make ends meet. They couldn't look for jobs or go on interviews because they had no child care for their 2 and 3-year-old children. I went on a home visit to get to know the family. The Judy Center enrolled them with KinderCare, our child care partner and provided tuition assistance. Since they had lost their health insurance when the dad became unemployed, I gave them an application for the Maryland Children's Health Insurance Program. The 3-year-old had behavior issues and was referred to the Judy Center behavior specialist who worked with her extensively. She also received tutoring services. Dad is now employed full-time. After much encouragement on our part, mom enrolled in Adult Education classes and received her GED. She also completed a Medical Assistants Program and is now preparing to enroll in the College of Southern Maryland to pursue an Associate's Degree. The children are entering kindergarten and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade this Fall and are doing well in school. The family

still actively participates in many Judy Center events. They frequently update me on their accomplishments and successes.

2. Jaquon came to us as a 3-year-old autistic child. He was in ½-day PreK and spent the other ½ day in the Judy Center child care. He could not speak any words and continuously whined and was inconsolable. Our teachers were trained to work with Jaquon and the Judy Center spent many hours helping his mom understand autism. They took part in Judy Center services and activities. The summer before he entered 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, he and his mom came to the school. She was moving and was withdrawing Jaquon. I walked up to him and told him how much I had missed him this summer. He hugged me around my legs and said, "I've missed you, too." A child who just a short time ago could not speak any words was now going to brave the world without the Judy Center. We are confident that he will be a contributing member of our society. It may have played out quite differently if this family had not had the support of the Judy Center.
3. When we met Khalil, he was in kindergarten and had a multitude of issues - toileting accidents, frequent absences from school, tooth pain and little appetite, he was lagging behind his peers and he failed the vision screening. His mom is a single parent with 3 older sons. Grandmother kept the children while mom worked as a housekeeper at a local motel. Many interventions for Khalil and his family occurred. Our pediatric dental partner examined his teeth and referred us to Kernan's Hospital in Baltimore for dental surgery for severe tooth decay. The Judy Center staff transported the family to Baltimore. The Lions Club arranged for LensCrafters to examine Khalil's eyes and subsequently provided him with glasses. The Judy Center arranged for him to be tutored at school. With his health issues under control and the academic assistance in place, this young man is now thriving.
4. Just a few weeks ago, I stopped at a McDonald's. A young lady gave me my food and said, "Hey Mr. Dennis, do you remember me?" I said, "I don't remember your name but I remember you. I met you when you were in 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade and you had a little brother and sister in the Judy Center. You also had three or four older brothers and sisters." She told me her name and I said, "You used to talk to me when you were having a bad day. You would talk back to the teachers and argue with your classmates. You were real smart but stayed in trouble." She said, "Yes, you used to get me focused again. I was a little hard headed but you would listen to my side and calm me down." I was thinking she had graduated from high school and her job was now working at McDonald's. But then she said, I graduate from high school in three weeks, I have a 3.9 GPA, and a full scholarship to Morgan State University." So you can see, the work of the Judy Center has long term positive effects.