

HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE: 3/11/08: PUBLIC HEARING

Testimony of Carolyn Signorelli
Chief Child Protection Attorney

RB No. 666



Commission on Child Protection
State of Connecticut

Office of the Chief Child Protection Attorney

Good Morning Senator Harris, Representative Villano and esteemed Committee Members. My name is Carolyn Signorelli, Chief Child Protection Attorney for the State of Connecticut. I head the relatively new agency called the Commission on Child Protection. As many of you are aware the Commission on Child Protection and my office are responsible for the system of legal representation for children and parents in cases of abuse, neglect and termination of parental rights brought by the Department of Children and Families in Juvenile Court. I am also a member of the Children's Trust Fund Council and serve on its Executive Board. The Children's Trust Fund is the primary state agency responsible for programs specifically intended to prevent child abuse and neglect.

I respectfully submit the following testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 666, An Act Concerning the Reduction of Child Poverty. This bill provides important support for locally based initiatives to help communities and families stop the cycle of poverty. In order to ensure that our state government is not duplicating efforts, creating redundancies and reinventing wheels, I would submit that the Human Services Committee include the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) as a part of its strategy to support responsible fathering. NFN has already proven to be successful in engaging a growing number of fathers and helped them become productive and positive participants in their child's life.

I therefore support the Children's Trust Fund's proposal that in addition to offering grants to develop new programs, this Committee recommend funding to enhance the staffing of the Nurturing Families Network so that it can more fully engage fathers through its network which includes 42 community based organizations across the state that provide screening, parenting groups and home visiting services. This network supports parents by assisting them with educational, employment, health care, housing, parenting and child development needs. Research on the program establishes that NFN employs best practices

which enable parents, including fathers, to enhance their capacity to become productive citizens and raise their children.

In relation to the Pilot Program outlined in Section 6 of the bill, the Committee should be aware that the NFN program administered by the Children's Trust Fund already employs successful strategies to achieve the five goals the pilot is intended to address. The suggestion by the Executive Director of the Children's Trust Fund in her submitted testimony that the specific resource gaps that NFN has already encountered and identified be targeted with the funding proposed for the pilot is one that the Committee should adopt. This will save countless hours of committee meetings and resource studies, etc. and provide those implementing the pilot and allocating its resources a focus based upon information we already have about what more needs to be done to help the families these agencies serve.

I'd like to take this opportunity to commend the Committee for raising this bill which seeks to coordinate prevention efforts among existing state agencies and ensure that the key needs of our children and families are met early in order to break the cycle of poverty that is stifling the potential of so many of our children. The Children's Trust Fund is doing exemplary work in our communities significantly reducing the risk of child abuse and neglect in families that are at high risk and its success should be built upon to reach as many families as possible.

Thank you for this opportunity to be heard. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully Submitted,

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