

Testimony of Kristine Johnson
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Madonna Place
Prepared for the Human Services Committee
Public Hearing – Tuesday, March 11th at 10:30 a.m.
Raised Bill No. 666 - An Act Concerning the Reduction of Child Poverty

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my support of the Raised Bill No. 666. I believe it is in the best interest of the families we serve throughout the state of Connecticut to include the Nurturing Families Network Fatherhood component to this bill.

At Madonna Place, an agency that has been vested in our community for over 20 years, a vast majority of our families are low-income households who are struggling to survive and getting ahead seems fleeting. We all know that increasing literacy, education and job training are vital components to ones ability to become self-sufficient and provide for oneself and children. However, the question is how to end the cycle that poverty maintains without providing people with the proper tools and ability to make lifetime changes. Knowing that there is a need for various educational and supportive services isn't enough. We need the funds to be able to teach and assist people to implement what they have had the opportunity to learn in their lives.

In my experience working with families for over ten years, I know the importance of working with the complete family unit, whether mom and dad are parenting the child as a couple or not. I am glad to see that there is a desire and awareness to assist low-income mothers, but we're only partially addressing the issue. Fathers are a vital role to the well being of their children. They deserve and are asking for the opportunity to succeed in a very tough society, where there are not always opportunities for them to learn and sharpen new skills, and have the support they so desperately need to become self-sufficient parents in our community and positive members in society.

I have found it very disheartening when I have heard fathers voice the struggles they face because there is limited support available to them. Throughout the four programs in Madonna Place, we serve fathers who have full custody of their children to those trying to find out if they are the biological father, and everyone in between. There is a sincere need for the father's in our community to receive services to help strengthen and stabilize their families.

It is imperative that the state of Connecticut expands much needed services to the fathers of the Nurturing Families Network, to show that we are vested in their future as well as their future of their children. A chance to grow and better oneself as a parent, has a lasting impact that benefits the children of our wonderful State beyond measure.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention that I also support section 6 of the bill to provide work readiness pilot program for first-time mothers. As mentioned above, the value of learning skills and increasing knowledge that will assist in self-sufficiency is priceless. At Madonna Place, we see and hear from countless single mothers who are looking for a chance to get help and succeed. I have heard from numerous individuals that it seems like they have to be a

“substance” abuser or have extreme mental health issues to get help for themselves and their families. It’s unfortunate that some people who have hit hard times and are looking to make improvements find the doors of various services closed to them because they don’t have a “diagnosis” besides poverty.

The services that the Children’s Trust Fund already funds through the Nurturing Families Network and other programs are instrumental in assisting the families of Connecticut. However, it’s a big job and more assistance is so vitally needed. People need a chance to succeed.

As parents access their potential they will learn how to encourage their children to succeed and access their potential as well. The saying that children learn what they live is a very simple yet effective statement. If children live with learning to succeed and take pride in their efforts and accomplishments, they will learn to do the same and pass that value on to their own children.

Sincerely,



Kristine Johnson
Program Manager