

Testimony of Elizabeth Conklin B.S. M.P.H.
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Bill # 666- An Act Concerning the Reduction of Child Poverty

My name is Elizabeth Conklin and I am the clinical supervisor of the Nurturing Families Network program at Eastern Connecticut Health Network: Manchester Memorial and Rockville General Hospital. I have worked in the Nurturing Families Network program for over eight years.

I am here to testify and support **Bill # 666- An Act Concerning the Reduction of Child Poverty**. I would also like to affirm the value of the Children's Trust Fund program: Nurturing Families Network and how it supports the efforts of the bill.

The Nurturing Families Network program identifies from among first time parents prenatally and during their hospital delivery, those at risk for child abuse and neglect. They are offered weekly home visits on a voluntary basis up to five years. Through successful expansion over the last decade the program is now in every Connecticut birthing hospital which ensures universal screening and engagement. Visits focus on teaching child development, conducting developmental screening, teaching appropriate parenting skills, and case management. The goal is reduced incidents of abuse and increased parental skills, while reducing risk factors thus promoting educational achievement, employment, and economic stability in the home. There is research through the longitudinal study at the University of Hartford validating the effectiveness of the program.

Client demographics include teen parents, undocumented families, single parents living in near poverty, living alone or with family, a mixture of high school educational achievements, and varying level of involvement of the father of the baby. These are slow to trust clients, many from dysfunctional families lacking good role models in parenting, education, and employment. Using the window of opportunity, the mutual concern for the wellbeing of the baby, we educate new parent about their child but also on the paramount need to provide economic stability for this child long term. It is there our work as life skill advocates is crucial.

Bill #666 proposes increasing services in literacy, educational achievement, and the promotion of father involvement as means to reduce child poverty. The Children's Trust Fund and Nurturing Families are champions in early education. However, there is still a need for programming and services to link families with higher educational and work training opportunities. This needs to be accessible for both mothers and fathers as we

promote shared responsibility for raising a child. Many of our families lack basic skills in opening a checking account, budgeting, completing an application for financial aid, filling out a job application, and how to prepare for an interview. Some of this is due to youth, some of it is due to low literacy, low educational achievement, and lack of parental role modeling. Whatever their situation we want families to succeed as parents and as contributing members of society.

While “knowledge is power”, just completing high school is not sufficient in today’s job market. Higher education and job training opportunities are required to develop a viable career. We believe parents want the best for their child but we remind them that being a parent does not negate the need for their own achievement. We try to reduce barriers to education by providing advocacy, resources, and encouragement.

We embrace the value that both parents bring to the life of a child however we know that fathers in high risk families may not be the primary provider. We strive to engage fathers in our program, many of them participate even though they do not reside with the mother. Many young fathers face the same challenges as young mothers: growing up in a dysfunctional family, poor role models in parenting, education, and employment stability. In many cases they need a trustworthy male mentor and role model. The specialized services as proposed in **Bill #666** would benefit not only Nurturing Families fathers but others statewide. Fathers deserve the chance and support to reach their full potential as parents and citizens.

In closing, **Bill #666** outlines positive program ideas to promote education, job training, work opportunities, and fatherhood initiatives as means to reduce child poverty. Nurturing Families Network is an effective preventative program that builds healthy families throughout the state and offers a great partnership for the bill. We know that prevention is cost effective so I urge you to fund **Bill #666** to promote the wellbeing of our at risk children. In life some things are optional, but having skills to provide for the wellbeing of a child is not.

The saying goes: “The best minute you spend is the one you invest in people”. Let us invest wisely for our children’s sake.

Thank you for your time.