

**Testimony submitted on February 18, 2009 to the  
State of Connecticut's Appropriations Committee  
on the**

**Governor's Proposed Budget: To eliminate the Children's Trust Fund and to  
transfer some of its programs to the Department of Children and Families.**

Good evening. As director of the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford, I have been researching the Nurturing Families Network home visitation program for 14 years, longer than even the Children's Trust Fund has been involved. This program has been developed from the ground up, always based upon research that was intended to create the best practices possible within the program.

I am here today to state strongly and unequivocally that removing this program (and others) from the stewardship of the Children's Trust Fund would be nothing short of a disaster; further, I would suggest that the Governor's recommendation stems from a poor understanding of the program, its development, and the important role that it plays in stabilizing families -- a role, I might add, that is extraordinarily important in the current economic crisis.

Let me identify a few of the reasons why the proposal is shortsighted.

First, the partnership established between the University of Hartford and the Children's Trust Fund advances a process in which research reports do not sit on shelves after meeting bureaucratic requirements, but are instead at the center of program development

and practice. Karen Foley-Schain, the executive director of the CTF, routinely scours every report that we write in search of any insights she can acquire to strengthen the program. We have sat together through hours of individual and research committee meetings to figure out ways to utilize the findings in reports to improve program practices. Karen is unique and her agency a model for how research evaluation should be used to improve state programs and to put state money to its most effective use.

Second, we are currently working with Karen on a number of promising projects that will certainly have an impact on program services – including research with fathers of children in the NFN program, as well as research to strengthen services for mothers suffering from depression. Removing the Children’s Trust Fund and Karen’s leadership from this partnership will disrupt this research and undermine a successful process that has been established over the past 10 years for developing effective prevention programs to strengthen vulnerable families in Connecticut.

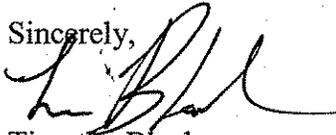
There is much more I could say, but if there is nothing else I leave you with today, I hope it is this third and final point. Nurturing Families programs are intended to engage vulnerable families in intensive, personal services that involve their children. There is simply no way – no way! – that the majority of these families would volunteer if this program was run by DCF. Over the years, I have marveled at the ability of home visitors to gain the trust, intimacy, and confidence of some of our most socially and economically marginalized families, truly our most vulnerable families in the state. In fact, this is the backbone of the program’s success. The first question that most of these families ask

when I approach them with research concerns or when program staff recruit them into the program is whether we are affiliated with DCF – it is the screening question.

To conclude let me say it plainly and simply, turning this program over to DCF will not only constitute the beginning of the end of the program and will not only wipe out 14 years of some of the best program development I have ever seen, it will not save the state money in the long run. A \$1.5 million cut in program services today will result in millions of dollars spent on treating the consequences of family instability tomorrow.

I'd be happy to take any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy Black', written over the word 'Sincerely,'.

Timothy Black  
Director, Center for Social Research  
University of Hartford

