

February 18, 2009
Appropriations Committee Testimony

Dear Members of the **Appropriations Committee**, Connecticut General Assembly:

I would like to offer testimony regarding **The Governor's Budget Recommendations**, particularly as relevant to the proposal to **eliminate the Children's Trust Fund and its staff, and to transfer some of its programs to the Department of Children and Families**.

I live in Hampton, and I am an Associate Professor and the Associate Department Head for Graduate Studies, Department of Human Development & Family Studies, University of Connecticut, Storrs. I am writing in my capacity as a "prevention" researcher, with expertise in child abuse prevention and extensive involvement with the relevant state agencies in Connecticut.

Although it is my understanding that some of the successful programs created and administered by the Children's Trust Fund (CTF; e.g., the home visitation and parenting programs that comprise the Nurturing Families Network) are to be moved into the Department of Children and Families (DCF), I have several concerns.

- 1) There are some strong and relevant initiatives within DCF; however, the agency has not emphasized prevention. As the state agencies serving children and families are supposed to be increasing their focus on prevention¹, this proposed move could work against efforts to add effective, efficient prevention programming within the state as costs for treatment and intervention balloon out of control.
- 2) The design, implementation, and evaluation of prevention programs require expertise and commitment, which might be lost without the institutional experiences of staff at the CTF.
- 3) The CTF has emphasized evidence-based prevention efforts and made consistent efforts to bring valid prevention programs to scale in the state and conduct appropriate evaluations of such efforts. In areas such as the prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome, for example, the CTF's efforts have been grounded in the best available research. I have concerns that this important prevention initiative would not continue within DCF.
- 4) Whereas attempts at cost savings in the current economic climate are necessary, there do not appear to be significant savings from this proposal, if prevention programming is to be maintained. Periods of economic stress are not the appropriate time for eliminating child abuse and neglect prevention programs; economic stress, family stress, removal of other support systems, and child abuse and neglect are all correlated, according to a robust academic literature.

I fail to see "efficiency" in this proposal, and I have concerns that the proposed move would strike a blow to child abuse and neglect prevention efforts in Connecticut. Thank you for considering my testimony.

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¹ Public Act 06-179, An Act Concerning State Investment in Prevention, *available at* <http://www.cga.ct.gov/COC/preventionlaw.htm>