Connecticut Children's MEDICAL CENTER

SAINT FRANCIS *Care*

TESTIMONY AGAINST H.B. No. 6365
RE: ELIMINATION OF THE CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND
Nina Livingston, MD
February 18, 2009

My name is Nina Livingston. I am an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine and the Medical Director of Hartford Regional Child Abuse Services. Through our programs at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center, we provide multidisciplinary evaluation of children when maltreatment is suspected. I am testifying today against HB number 6365 and in support of the continuation of the Children's Trust Fund. The Children's Trust Fund provides direct prevention services to families and children at the highest risk for abuse and prevention education to front line care providers. I believe that in order to effectively partner with care providers and families, these programs must continue to be administered by an agency that is perceived as neutral and is not a part of the state child protective services. The Children's Trust Fund also has a culture of evidence-based program selection and meaningful program evaluation, which I believe to be essential to their success; I fear that their programs would not perform as well in other hands. I would like to highlight the importance of the Children's Trust Fund's Shaken Baby Prevention programs.

Abusive Head Trauma (also known as Shaken Baby Syndrome) is a devastating form of child abuse primarily affecting infants. The most commonly identified trigger for abusive head trauma is crying. As every parent knows, infant crying is tremendously stressful. A momentary loss of control by a frustrated caretaker can kill or permanently disable a healthy baby. The cost of medical care alone can exceed 300,000 for a single child; the human cost is incalculable. I see these babies in my clinical practice. On the day that I received the news that the Children's Trust Fund might be eliminated, I evaluated three seriously abused infants, two of whom had significant brain injuries.

Effective prevention exists. In 2005 Dr. Mark Dias published a study demonstrating that brief caretaker pre-discharge education in the newborn nursery reduced population incidence of abusive head trauma by 47% in a large geographic area. The Children's Trust Fund has worked diligently to spread this prevention strategy within our state, and partnered with us to make the Dias model part of routine pre-discharge education for newborns in our institutions. The Children's Trust Fund is now working to implement and evaluate other promising prevention strategies around the state. They have organized an April 2009 forum on shaken baby prevention with renowned speakers in the field, and this event will shine a national spotlight on Connecticut's exemplary prevention efforts.

As stress increases for all parents in our state, we need to sustain the Children's Trust Fund's efforts to avert the costly tragedy of child abuse. The fruits of their labors are the children I will never meet—children who can realize their full potential, free of the burden of abuse. We cannot afford to reduce or alter these critical services. Please support the continuation of the CT Children's Trust Fund.