

**BILL NO. 839 AN ACT CONCERNING MERGERS AND CONSOLIDATIONS OF VARIOUS STATE AGENCIES**

*Testimony in Support of the Children's Trust Fund, State of Connecticut*

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my views in support of retaining the Children's Trust Fund as the lead agency in child maltreatment prevention in Connecticut. My name is Jennifer Vendetti and I coordinate the Nurturing Families Network at the UCONN Health Center. The Nurturing Families Network is a statewide primary and secondary prevention program of child abuse and neglect and is comprised of three main programs; 1) screening/engagement and postpartum phone support, 2) prenatal and parenting group programs, and 3) intensive home visitation. Within these programs, families around the state are provided with socioemotional support, access to services, information and education on fetal/infant/child development, assessment of infant/child development, family advocacy, and case management. These services are necessary for the health and well-being of caregivers, children, and communities. The Nurturing Families Network is the largest of the programs funded and administered by the Children's Trust Fund. There are forty-two sites statewide including all twenty-nine birthing hospitals to provide Nurturing Families Network services.

I come here today because I am deeply concerned about the Governor's budget proposal to eliminate the Children's Trust Fund. Since 1997, the Children's Trust Fund has shown success in administering over fifteen prevention programs that have yielded positive outcomes demonstrated through research. The Governor proposes to shift 90% of the Children's Trust Fund budget to the Department of Children and Families' prevention budget. In doing so, we lose a social service delivery infrastructure that has to be rebuilt within another agency- is this cost-effective? Additionally, the DCF is well-known for outsourcing the administration and coordination of its programs, particularly in non-child protection services. If the DCF is likely to do the same with the 13.5 million for child maltreatment prevention, why make the change? Again, how is this cost-effective?

I also believe that we risk the efficiency of service delivery by shifting the same necessary functions such as administration, oversight and accountability, technical assistance, program fidelity, quality improvement and evaluation to another agency. The Children's Trust Fund has been extremely successful at these functions and leadership is a key component to effective program development and implementation.

Finally, I am concerned that if programs such as the Nurturing Families Network are continued by the DCF, the proposed agency shift would greatly undermine our ability to engage families in our services given the stigmatization that is frequently associated with child protection agency involvement. Often families we meet with are skeptical about initiating home visitation services because of past negative experiences with systems or because of fear of a child protection investigation. They ask us, "Are you DCF?". The Children's Trust Fund was at one time embedded within the DCF. I believe that the separation from the DCF increases families' likelihood of program participation. We don't want to lose our ability to engage families.

As a policy practice social worker, I question the legitimacy of a policy that dismantles a social service delivery infrastructure only to recreate that infrastructure within another agency. I question the rationale for transferring 13.5 million dollars to the DCF which has its hands full with child protection services work. I question why alternative budget cuts to the CTF that do not eliminate infrastructure and development aren't being considered. I question the cost-effectiveness of this budget proposal.

I hope that you will consider alternatives to the Governor's proposed budget to eliminate the Children's Trust Fund by recognizing the value of a lead agency for child maltreatment prevention and the decade of success they have had in developing, administering and overseeing evidence-based programs that prevent child protection involvement and strengthen Connecticut families.

Please contact me at any time with your questions or comments.

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