

Testimony of Kathleen G. Novak

Re: Bill No.839 - An Act Concerning Mergers and Consolidation of Various State Agencies to
the Government Administration and Elections Committee

3/16/09

My name is Kathleen G. Novak and I am testifying today about the egregious proposal of Governor Rell to eliminate the Children's Trust Fund and its entire staff from the budget. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and former supervisor and program manager of the Healthy Families CT – Hartford child abuse and neglect prevention program now called Nurturing Families Network. The prevention efforts of the CTF must be preserved, not denied to our most vulnerable citizens by eliminating this indispensable state agency. Their efforts would be increased by adding the current DCF prevention efforts and expanding the role of the CTF because it is this agency that has the expertise in this field, not DCF which should remain loyal to its mission of treatment.

The CTF programs utilize education of the public and clients and families in order to meet the goal of safeguarding the lives of our children. On April 16, 2009, for example, it will hold a Forum on Shaken Baby Syndrome at the Wadsworth Atheneum, to which the community is invited to learn about this serious health issue of babies. Campaigns such as these are vital to the awareness of us all about the issues affecting our children, and no agency does it like the CTF. The Family Empowerment Programs such as "Real Men Make Better Dads" that addresses single parenting uses research findings that show that dual parent households are less likely to be in poverty than single parent homes. The CTF recognizes that poverty is a major contributing factor to child abuse and neglect, and thus integrates this knowledge when planning its programs. The Family School Connection programs use social indicators when supporting programs that provide home and school based support to families whose children are tardy, truant or have behavioral or academic issues. The Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford that is charged with program evaluation, in its 2007 Process and Outcome Evaluation Report showed that there was significant increase in parent-school involvement after six months and one year, and significant decrease in parental stress for the similar time periods. Other family systems that the CTF supports are grandparents or other relatives that must take on child guardianship roles. Its Kinship Fund and Respite Fund support this population that find themselves stressed from the unplanned financial, emotional and social burdens of caring for young children. And the Help Me Grow program is an excellent example of the intensive collaboration of services between medical practitioners, parents and others with the Birth-3 System, 211 Info line and other public health and education programs aimed at prevention of serious medical/behavioral issues.

The chief goal of the NFN programs that offer extensive prevention services to first time parents is to keep families out of the DCF "treatment" system by providing support via telephone, groups and intensive in-home visitation. In 2006, the Center for Social Research showed that there was considerable decline in DCF reports made and substantiated on NFN families. "The Hartford Expansion of 2005" provided eight more NFN home visitation sites to combat the extreme poverty-induced risk factors of Hartford's families. Over 1,000 community resource referrals were made by home visitors in 2005 and two-thirds of these were followed up by families.

The prevention programs of the CTF are indispensable in PREVENTING child abuse and neglect and fostering positive parenting. No other state agency in my view is as dedicated to these goals and to the elimination of the grave social problem of child abuse and neglect. No other agency is as equipped to collaborate, train and integrate the findings of research as the CTF when it comes to prevention of child abuse and neglect. It has a proven record of results, marked by the belief in continuous education, compassion and support. I applaud the efforts of Karen Foley-Schain and her staff in caring for our most vulnerable citizens and implore you, the members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee to do everything you can to preserve this invaluable state agency. Thank you.