

Testimony of City of New Haven, Health Department, Nurturing Families Network
Government Administration & Elections Committee Public Hearing March 16, 2009

Gov Bill # 839, An Act Concerning Mergers & Consolidations of various state agencies, Sect. 14

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this public testimony. I am here in opposition to having the Children's Trust Fund come under the Department of Children and Families. My name is Kathleen Hagearty. I am the Clinical Supervisor for the Nurturing Families Network program at the Health Department of the City of New Haven. I am here to express my support for maintaining the Children's Trust Fund Council as a distinct entity. It is not in the best long term interests of Connecticut's taxpayers, program participants, or staff to change the program's oversight.

Under the umbrella of CTF, the Nurturing Families Network program is able to provide a coordinated, tested prevention model to educate and serve Connecticut parents, particularly those at highest risk for abuse and neglect. The recent annual report clearly shows the impact and success of the program. I would like to comment on the role of CTF from my viewpoint as a long time social worker, now working in an urban public health department. The training and technical assistance given by the CTF Council enables us to meaningfully engage first time parents, teen parents, fathers, and other parents to deliver a high quality of service. New Haven's NFN services were able to expand in late 2007 to a total of eight sites serving the greater New Haven area. As new programs were funded, CTF was instrumental in providing support to develop a collaborative network which is able to reach out and serve our diverse community. Their involvement ensures this unique collaboration will be strengthened and sustained, and that our collective staff persons continue to be among the most highly trained in Connecticut. Lastly, parents are willing to accept services from the NFN program because they trust the local provider and our relationship with the Children's Trust Fund.

The New Haven Health Department works to promote good health care every day and thereby reduce future risks and costs. We strongly believe that there needs to be a recognition of the importance of prevention in our system of care. Under the Children's Trust Fund we have an opportunity to intervene in the lives of children prior to birth and for the first five years of their lives. Our staff use best practices and evidence based research to provide information and education through intensive home visiting, prenatal and parenting groups. Home visiting is not just dropping in on a new parent, it is a thoughtful planned time where a family can learn new skills and risks are identified and addressed. CTF appreciates this model requires staff with specialized skills and an ability to work not only with a diverse community but also in intimate settings. They ensure not only initial training but also ongoing support with other colleagues doing the same work. The staff who facilitate our group work receive similar training and support.

For me, involving fathers and other male caregivers is just plain good social work practice. That being said I realize we in social services have often fallen short in this area. The Children's Trust Fund listened to staff concerns as well as findings about achievement and poverty and supported a focus on father involvement. The Fatherhood Initiative and the CTF committees directly address this failing with a dedicated effort to specifically reach out to fathers. Again, beginning prenatally, we see a proactive approach to ensuring greater success for our children.

Our parents have come to the Capital and talked about working with the Nurturing Families Network. Their engagement and positive experiences are in part due to the structure of the program being within the Children's Trust Fund. Thank you very much for your attention and consideration.

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