



Testimony submitted by

**Dr. Timothy Black
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at the

**State of Connecticut's
Government Administration and Elections Committee
Public Hearing: March 16, 2009**

about

**Bill No. 839
An Act Concerning Mergers and Consolidations of various state agencies**

Good morning. I am Tim Black, director of the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford. I have been researching the Nurturing Families Network home visitation program for 14 years, longer than even the Children's Trust Fund has been involved. I am here today to speak against the Governor's recommendation to eliminate the Children's Trust Fund and absorb its programs into the Department of Children and Families. Let me preface my remarks by saying that I am not speaking out of self-interest -- research monies in the proposal have not been cut and would likewise be transferred to DCF. Instead my comments are based upon the investment I have made in the program for more than a decade and my concern that removing the stewardship of CTF might very well lead to the demise of what I believe is one of the state's strongest interventions in

supporting and strengthening vulnerable families in Connecticut, something particularly important in a period of economic crisis.

Let me make three quick points on why I believe the proposal is shortsighted.

First, the missions of DCF and CTF are different, as they should be. DCF is an enforcement agency responsible for child protection. The CTF is a prevention agency – an agency that prevents vulnerable families from coming to the attention of DCF by identifying them early and offering support and educational services to strengthen parenting and to keep family members focused on child needs, particularly in stressful periods that are difficult for most of us sitting in this room to imagine.

Second, under the leadership of the CTF, research is at the center of the program development. Research reports do not sit on shelves after meeting bureaucratic requirements. Karen Foley-Schain, the executive director of the CTF, routinely scours every report that we write in search of any insights she can acquire to strengthen the program. The program is seen as a work-in-progress and is continually being modified by research findings to improve its effectiveness. Karen is unique and her agency a model for how research evaluation should be used to improve state programs and to put state money to its most effective use.

Third, and most important, Nurturing Families programs are intended to engage vulnerable families in intensive, personal services that involve their children. There is

simply no way that the majority of these families would volunteer if this program was run by DCF. Over the years, I have marveled at the ability of home visitors to gain the trust, intimacy, and confidence of some of our most socially and economically marginalized families in the state. In fact, this is the backbone of the program's success. The first question that most of these families ask when my staff approach them with research concerns or when program staff recruit them into the program is whether we are affiliated with DCF – *it is the screening question*.

To conclude, as someone with a long-term investment in this program, I believe that turning this program over to DCF will not only constitute the beginning of the end of the program and will not only wipe out 14 years of some of the best program development I have ever seen, it will not save the state money in the long run. A \$1.5 million cut in program services today will result in millions of dollars spent on treating the consequences of family instability tomorrow.

I'd be happy to take any questions.