

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
Concerning Governor Rell's Proposed Budget Cuts for the Children's Trust Fund

December 9, 2009

My name is Charles M. Super, and I am a resident of the town of Woodstock. I am opposed to Governor Rell's eviscerating proposal regarding the Children's Trust Fund (CTF), and urge you instead to at least leave what remains (after the last cuts) of one of Connecticut's most effective and efficient units.

I am presently Professor of Human Development and Pediatrics at the University of Connecticut, and have been involved for over a decade in evaluation of some of the Children's Trust Fund's programs, specifically the Nurturing Families Networks (NFN) and the Family Development Training program. I know the kinds of families helped by these programs, and the long-term outcomes for the health, development, and ultimate productive contributions of the parents and children whose lives are transformed.

The home-visiting program of NFN (just one of its several undertakings) typically serves nearly 2,000 very high risk families annually; with the economic crisis, this year's figure will exceed 2,400. Participants in the home visiting program evidence a rate of child abuse and neglect less than one-quarter of that for comparable but unserved families (that is, 3-4 % vs. 20-25%). One can make a very conservative estimate that closing *just this one program* will result in an additional 484 new cases of child abuse and neglect referred to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in 2010. As you know, DCF is required by law to respond to such cases. At approximately \$30,000 per case, the additional annual cost will be \$14.5 million. In sum, the Governor's proposal to save \$12 million per year (actually, only \$5.5 million in FY10) will have the direct and very predictable result – from this one component of the CTF's programs – of a *net increase* of \$2.5 million in cost to the taxpayers (\$14.5 - \$12). These costs would of course accumulate in subsequent years; and because abused and neglected children are at much greater risk for dropping out of school, unemployment, and involvement in crime, the actual cost of the Governor's proposed cut will increase substantially as the human toll is ultimately reflected in increased workloads for the police, judiciary, penal system, and social services.

Even recognizing that balancing our state's budget requires many and painful cuts, I am at a loss to understand how one might justify the virtual elimination of this program.

It cannot be a fiscal argument. As indicated above, the Governor's proposal will actually *increase* costs to the taxpayers by \$2.5 million per year, immediately, with greater public costs as the damaged children grow to physical maturity.

It cannot be an argument based on helping the economy. The current focus of responses to the economic crisis, as you know, is on protecting and creating jobs. Virtually all the CTF funds slated to be cut are contracted out to community organizations who use them to hire field staff – the home visitors, to be specific. These are positions with very modest salaries. Cutting these funds, therefore, will result in a relatively high number of job losses per dollar saved, something surely one would aim to minimize. In addition – and this particularly distinguishes the CTF funds from many other possibilities – each of these jobs generates specific savings to the state (e.g. DCF interventions, welfare) and ultimately increases tax revenue (as participants move from destitution to employment). Just as each of these jobs multiplies benefits to the state's fiscal standing, so cutting them multiplies the damage.

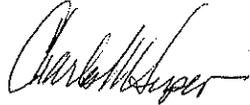
It cannot be an argument based on political philosophy. Helping a pregnant, homeless, 16-year-old find a safe place to live, connect to prenatal care, break free of an abusive relationship, and obtain job training and adequate child care assistance surely qualifies as what Edmund Burke, the founder of modern conservative thought, considered the State's obligation to protect those who are too weak to defend themselves. Equally certain, such a project falls

squarely within the liberal and progressive agenda for the improvement of society and its citizens.

Most of all, it cannot be an ethical argument. Even the briefest examination of what is at stake indicates the proposal to eviscerate the Children's Trust Fund is a cruel and shameless rejection of fundamental moral considerations.

I urge you to reject, instead, this part of the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan, and protect what remains of one of Connecticut's most effective and most valuable programs.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Charles M. Super".

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