

December 8, 2009

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Evelyn Gorsline-Flamm and I am the Clinical Supervisor of the Nurturing Families Network at the Fair Haven Community Health Center in New Haven. I am here today to urge you to vote **NO** in order to defeat the Governor's proposed budget cuts. These drastic cuts would virtually eliminate the Children's Trusts Fund's vital child abuse prevention program, the Nurturing Families Network (NFN). NFN's valuable programs provide parenting education and support through intensive home visiting and parenting groups to *the* most vulnerable populations, including pregnant and parenting first time families, many who are teens facing linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers to accessing critical services.

The Governor's plan calls for suspending funding for "NFN non-hospital sites," and with only \$1.4 million left in the budget, it will force NFN sites across the state to close. These drastic cuts proposed by the Governor are deep, hurt people, and directly impact the well being of our children and their future!

The University of Hartford's Center for Social Research has been evaluating the impact of the Nurturing Families Network for 15 years, and has provided impressive results that NFN significantly reduces child abuse and neglect. Annual rates of abuse and neglect for our high-risk families range from 1% to 6%, well below the 20 to 25% seen in other comparable, vulnerable populations.

Notable achievements experienced by our families and witnessed by our staff on a day to day basis demonstrate that our program is effective, addresses serious gaps in the health care system and is desperately needed. These achievements include:

- referring and successfully connecting families to needed community services, including housing, employment and education, food and diapers, and mental health and medical care.
- supporting pregnant and parenting teens to complete high school or obtain their GED. Research has shown that completing high school improves the health and well-being of parents and children.
- helping parents obtain and maintain employment, even in today's tough economy.

These successes are largely due to our NFN program being part of the Fair Haven Community Health Center (FHCHC) and integrated into prenatal and primary care teams where coordination of quality care is expected and provided. NFN home visitors help teens to make and keep their prenatal appointments, resulting in healthy birth outcomes. NFN home visitors help patients address their medical concerns by connecting them with their midwife or primary care provider, which decreases unnecessary and costly emergency room visits. Additionally, NFN home visitors ensure that every parent and child have a medical home. As a result, 100% of children in the program are up to date on their immunizations.

The most important successes are the individual achievements of the moms, dads and children in our program. It is in hearing the stories of our families that that you will fully appreciate the high value of NFN services. I'd like to take a few moments and share some of these stories.

A 19-year-old father wanted to finish his high school education, but was unable to because he had to work to support his family. Our home visitor told him about the online GED programs, and he signed up without telling her. Months later he called the home visitor, and said he had good news to share with her at their next visit. When she arrived, the father held up his GED certificate and said, "Surprise! Look what I did!"

A 16-year-old mom in DCF custody was facing being separated from her newborn son because an appropriate foster home could not be identified. During home visits we had learned that she was frequently moved between family members and received inconsistent nurturing throughout her childhood. Our NFN program was able to help prevent this separation by advocating for a placement that would allow mom and baby to stay together. She was recently placed with a nurturing foster mother who will provide a stable and caring home where weekly home visits will continue.

A 17-year-old mother was thrown out of her house by her mother immediately after her baby girl was born. Through referrals to community resources the home visitor was able to obtain emergency housing, and connect her and the baby's father to resources including the diaper bank and food pantries. The home visitor was also able to help the baby's father obtain employment. With the support of the home visitor, this young family was able to avoid homelessness and have recently obtained stable housing.

A 20-year-old mom, newly arrived from Puerto Rico with limited English speaking skills was in extreme pain three days after delivering her baby. When the home visitor and I arrived and the mom described her pain, the midwife was called and a prescription for antibiotics was ordered. The presence of the bi-lingual, bi-cultural home visitor in the first few days of her son's life allowed the mom to obtain immediate comfort and enjoy early moments with her newborn.

In closing, we recognize that solving Connecticut's fiscal crisis will not be easy. We urge you, however, not to sacrifice our children as pawns in this budget balancing game. When making difficult decisions in balancing the budget, please make them responsibly and consider the effect that eliminating NFN will have on children and families across the state.

On behalf of our Nurturing Families Network Program, our families, and the children that we call the future, I again urge you to vote against this part of the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Gorsline-Flamm
Clinical Supervisor