



Cornell Scott Hill Health Corporation

Testimony to be given in regards to the Governor's proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan
December 9, 2009
Lydia Picco
Cornell Scott – Hill Health Center

Honorable Connecticut Legislators:

My name is Lydia Picco, and I am here on behalf of the staff and clients of the Nurturing Families Network program at the Cornell Scott – Hill Health Center in New Haven. I am here to speak about the Deficit Mitigation Plan, specifically the plan to cut the Nurturing Families Network programs.

Funding for the Children's Trust Fund and Nurturing Families Network (NFN) must remain in place and not be eliminated or reduced under the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan! The families it serves are so young, so very disadvantaged, and so eager to learn how to make a better life for their children! The program is strictly voluntary, and all the participants are engaged because they recognize their own need for support, and the ability of the Program to deliver!

Most of the families are extremely resource- poor, not only in terms of income but in terms of not having anyone in their lives who can help them, or who cares to help them. Some are completely without family or friends in the area, as unbelievable as that may seem. Some have been raised in the system and have never experienced an intact family by any definition. Who will tell them that the most important learning years of their infant's life are the ones before school, years in which they are the principal teachers?

Statewide, from 1995-2009, 31% of the nearly 43,000 first time families screened by NFN were found to be at high risk for abuse and neglect. So far in 2009, that percentage has risen to 37%. However, at the Cornell Scott – Hill Health Center over the past two years, 92% of first time families have screened as being high risk. Clearly, the number of children at risk for abuse and neglect is increasing in the State of Connecticut and has been exceptionally higher at our clinic, a program that is in line to be eliminated under the Deficit Mitigation Plan. This is absolutely the wrong time to cut funding for NFN, in which only 1 – 6% of participants have had substantiated cases of abuse and neglect, compared to the 20-25% we see in other high-risk populations.

Numbers and data aside, I will tell you one of the many examples of the ways that NFN has impacted the life of a vulnerable Connecticut family. An 18 year old pregnant woman engaged in our program. She was depressed, had unstable housing which soon led to homelessness, no source of income, and no one that was supportive of her, despite having several family members in the area. Over the two years that we have worked with her, she has since engaged in mental health services, found her own home, secured steady employment, and is enrolled at Gateway Community College. Her son, now 18 months old, is developmentally on target, up to date with immunizations and very well cared for.

No matter how much we may pride ourselves on being independent, none of us are independent. Each of us has had the hand up from someone, the nod of approval, a warm breakfast from Mom, someone who gave us tools to move forward. NFN gives its families knowledge, support, and confidence in doing the most important job in the world, raising another human being.

Thank you.