

Testimony of Elizabeth Conklin B.S. M.P.H.
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H.B. NO 6365 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2011, and Making Appropriations therefore.

My name is Elizabeth Conklin and I am the clinical supervisor of the Nurturing Families Network program at Eastern Connecticut Health Network: Manchester Memorial and Rockville General Hospital. I have worked in the Nurturing Families Network program for ten years.

This written testimony is to affirm the essential administrative function the Children's Trust Fund provides Connecticut through their child abuse prevention programs and initiatives. One of their highly successful programs, Nurturing Families Network is a state-wide service for new parents located at every birthing hospital and many community centers. Both the Children's Trust Fund and the Nurturing Families Network are critical to the wellbeing of Connecticut's children.

The Nurturing Families Network (NFN) program identifies parents prenatally and during their hospital delivery, those at risk for child abuse and neglect. Many are teen and single parents with dysfunctional family history, poor educational achievement, and minimal work history. They are offered weekly home visits on a voluntary basis up to five years. Through successful expansion over the last decade the program is now in every Connecticut birthing hospital which ensures universal screening and engagement. Visits focus on teaching child development, conducting developmental screening, teaching appropriate parenting skills, and case management. The goal is reduced incidents of abuse and increased parental skill while promoting educational achievement, employment, and economic stability in the home. There is research through the longitudinal study at the University of Hartford validating the effectiveness of the program.

The proposed budget puts the administration of the NFN program under the Department of Children and Families (DCF). This is problematic for various reasons. Families enroll during their hospital stay with the understanding they are enrolling in a voluntary educational program, NOT one associated with DCF. *Having DCF administer the program is contradictory to the philosophy of preventative and voluntary services that are NFN's trademark.* Families will hesitate to participate with a DCF affiliation. Parents will not receive the support and education they need and children will suffer in the end.

The integrity of the NFN program, over a decade of research, and other quality assurance measures well established by the Children's Trust Fund will be compromised under the already overburdened DCF administration. The services as they are designed and administered are effective and efficient and should not be altered. The Children's Trust Fund provides NFN sites valuable trainings, quality assurance, technical assistance, and other professional development opportunities which are crucial to the integrity of NFN. DCF cannot ensure or match the quality oversight that the Children's Trust Fund provides the NFN program and others they have implemented.

Who in the state will pursue programs that are in the best interest of our children if the Children's Trust Fund or NFN are gone? The result of a decision of this magnitude will result in even more children in DCF protective care..... doubling the state's burden, and not just financially.