Governor's Proposed Budget: To eliminate the Children's Trust Fund and its entire staff – and to transfer some of its programs to the Department of Children and Families

Written Testimony of John M. Leventhal, MD

I am John M. Leventhal, MD. I am the Medical Director of the Child Abuse Programs and Child Abuse Prevention Programs at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital and a Professor of Pediatrics at Yale University School of Medicine. I have worked in the area of child abuse for over 25 years, and during this time I have worked closely with DCF and police throughout the state and appreciate and respect the role of DCF in child abuse and neglect investigations.

For the last 10 years, I have worked closely with the Children's Trust Fund and am the Medical Director of the Nurturing Families Network Program at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital.

With all due respect to Governor Rell, I think it would be a terrible mistake to close CTF and move the prevention programs to DCF; this administrative move would set Connecticut's child abuse prevention effort back 20 years.

The State of Connecticut needs an agency whose major focus is on the prevention of abuse and neglect. DCF is not the agency to do this work; despite DCF's presence in our state for many years, Connecticut had no real prevention efforts until CTF got focused on this problem in the mid 1990's. CTF has been successful at developing prevention programs and helping our legislators understand the importance and value of these programs. Programs of any kind do not just happen. For statewide programs to be successful, there needs to be ongoing training, supervision, quality assurance, program evaluation, and program revisions and enhancements, and CFT has provided all of these and more. For example, with limited funding, CTF is working

to highlight public awareness of the importance of SBS (Shaken Baby Syndrome) prevention and has provided funding for pilot SBS prevention programs in several communities.

An additional major reason why prevention should not be transferred to DCF relates to an important and practical issue. The key CTF program around the state is the Nurturing Home Visiting Program in which trained home visitors provide weekly home visits to socially high risk, first-time mothers and fathers. Many of these young parents are wary of home visitors and ask whether the home visitor is connected to or works for DCF. Now, the answer is easy; the home visitors are not associated with DCF. If child abuse prevention programs do move to DCF and the home visitors were asked about the connection to DCF, it is clear that many of the families who agreed to participate and who benefited from the home visiting would not have agreed to have a worker linked to DCF in their home. Thus preventive services would not be provided. These families truly need preventive services, but the "DCF" name would be a major barrier for many families and would greatly reduce the likelihood that families would participate in this vital program.

In summary, I believe that the Sate would be making a major mistake in moving the prevention programs of CTF to DCF. CTF has done a superb job expanding Connecticut's child abuse prevention programs. Such efforts would be lost if transitioned to an agency that is responsible for the investigations of suspected abuse and neglect, and placing the prevention programs under DCF would create a major barrier for our families in need.

The state should not take steps backward, but instead should keep CTF as a separate, critical agency that focuses on the prevention of abuse and neglect. In the future, funding should be increased so that some day, all high-risk families in Connecticut receive these prevention services.