

Dear Appropriations Committee,

I unfortunately am unable to communicate to you in person how strongly I feel about preserving the funding for the Children's Trust and the Commission on Children. I am a member of the current Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) in Waterbury. Not even half-way into the course, I already know how incredibly fortunate I am to have the opportunity to network with like-minded parents, and to learn how to be an effective leader in my community. These are some of the reasons I believe that when I look back on the monumental events of my life, undergoing this training will be on the list:

- I have been made conscious that as a parent, I am a child's strongest advocate
- Every vote, and voice, can have far-ranging impact
- Regardless of our color, religion, cultural background or socioeconomic status, as parents we all share a common goal (making the world a better place for our children), and we can be extremely effective when we work together
- Communication skills, written and verbal, are paramount when seeking change - and PLTI places great emphasis on honing these
- The group's diversity opens up its trainees' minds to the plights faced by others - and creates greater unity
- Several of my classmates are newly naturalized citizens and undoubtedly appreciate their US citizenship all the more, as they are being trained to exercise their democratic vote, which was impossible in their countries of origin

Most of the members of my class are from Waterbury, which with its 60% (at least) poverty rate, highest rate of teen pregnancy, and lackluster to say the least, education and unemployment records, faces an overwhelming number of problems. More problems than any legislator could possibly tackle alone - but can be greatly mitigated by engaging concerned citizens, such as PLTI graduates. Unless you wish to funnel the majority of your budget into the judicial system (which will be the short-term and long-term effect of your proposed cuts), I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of maintaining programs such as those that fall under the umbrella of the Children's Trust and the Commission on Children. Unfortunately, many of today's societal problems are a result of short-term thinking and cuts masqueraded as reform. It would take great courage for legislators who are limited by relatively short terms, to actually legislate with the longer term in mind. Studies have repeatedly shown that funding programs that promote better parenting, citizenship, and basically give children a better chance at succeeding, end up costing society much less in the long run, both financially and in other less quantifiable but no less valuable ways.

I implore you to reconsider these budget cuts. By maintaining the programs in place, you will be communicating that 1) you care about Connecticut's children and families and 2) you are committed to empowering citizens. I am confident that you will be able to find other creative ways to reduce state spending, in ways that are less destructive.

Sincerely,

Susanne H. Navas  
Southbury, CT

Mrs. Jennifer Hull  
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February 18, 2009

Dear Governor Rell and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

As you may know, February has been designated as Parent Leadership month, and yet simultaneously the governors proposed budget cuts, which are the very programs designed to promote Parent Leadership are being threatened. Such impacted programs that promote Parent Leadership would be the People Empowering People (PEP) program, the Parent Leadership Training Program (PLTI) and the Parent SEE program all of which give tools to parents in the advocating for their families as well as teaching much needed civics. As many of you are aware, the Governor's budget proposal does not include funding for the Parent Trust Fund, the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) and the Commission on Children (COC); which is vital to the maintaining of numerous educational opportunities available to parents in the hopes of promoting Parent Leadership. In addition, Governor Rell has recommended the consolidation and elimination of some Agencies and Commissions that would eventually hinder the progress of Parent Leadership in our State as well as minimalizing the successes of these independent Agencies and Parent Leaders.

Obviously the loss of funding and consolidation to the Children's Trust Fund, the Commission on Children and the Parents Trust Fund would be detrimental because these funds/grants have been allocated to programs designed to educate parents on community organizing, advocacy, peer support and ways to strengthen our communities. These programs are sometimes the only resource a parent may have to gain ideas and skills, while safe, on-site childcare is provided. In a recent PEP program held at the Torrington Child Care Center participants met with key civic leaders, including Mayor Ryan Bingham. We learned to navigate community resources and we were required to complete a community project. One such project involved fundraising for a local family who had lost their 16 month old daughter to a prolonged terminal illness the funds raised provided the family with desperately needed funds.

These programs, that will be affected, are vital to a strong healthy community. Most of the participants in the PEP program stated that they would not have had the opportunity to participate in this program without having quality childcare provided; of note 100% of those who took part in the 10 week program completed it. Graduates from these programs have gone on to do wonderful things for their communities and the economy of the state. One local group worked with the Park and Recreation Department to put up new safer playscapes for our children, others have gone on to become facilitators and are leading new groups of parents, and finally there have been those parents who have become Board of Education members, Senators, City Council members, and Representatives.

Please do not cut the funding that provides a way for all of these parents to better educate themselves, strengthen their families and unite their communities.

Respectfully,

Jennifer Hull  
Parent Leader