

December 3, 2009

We are writing to ask for your active support in defeating Governor Rell's proposed budget cuts which will virtually eliminate the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund (CTF), the state's lead department for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

When Connecticut's Children's Trust Fund expanded their efforts in 1998, the only program strategies that existed for child abuse and neglect in the state at that time were treatment-focused – *after* the fact. The charge of Connecticut's Children's Trust Fund was to develop effective strategies for *preventing* child abuse and neglect. Towards these efforts, the Children's Trust Fund has a highly successful track record. Program highlights include:

1) Expansion of the **Nurturing Families Network**, a home visitation model designed to promote positive parenting and reduce incidences of child maltreatment. The program is affiliated with all 29 birthing hospitals in the state and has grown from two to forty-two program sites. In-home services have been provided to thousands of families at risk for abuse and poor parenting residing in all areas of the state.

2) National replication of Connecticut's **Help Me Grow** model, a system for helping families with young children who are facing behavioral, learning, and other developmental difficulties connect to health and human service programs. The Connecticut model has been replicated in five other states throughout the country and is currently being considered for replication in ten additional states.

3) Development of a relatively new initiative, **Family-School Connection**, a model that provides home visitation and support services for families with young children who are frequently tardy, absent or otherwise disconnected from school. The program is located at five schools within different areas of the state. Since risk for dropout can be identified as early as the third grade, targeting families during their children's early school years is a critical intervention point for addressing educational and parental neglect.

*Altogether, these programs reach a sizeable population of Connecticut's vulnerable families. In so doing, they provide a tremendous service to the state as a whole:*

- **How many families in Connecticut are being served?**
  - In 2009, home visitors of *Nurturing Families Network* have provided intensive services to 1,815 first-time, high-risk mothers throughout the state.
  - Care coordinators at the *Help Me Grow* centralized call center received an annual average of 2,565 calls from parents, pediatricians, and others with concerns about a child's learning, development or behavior during the past three years.
  - In 2009, home visitors of *Family-School Connection* have provided intensive services to 106 families and children who are showing all the early signs of poor school success and risk for drop out.
- **Who are these Connecticut families? What places them at risk?**
  - Families living in crises every day: violence, poverty, substance abuse, psychological problems, and medical problems
  - Mothers who are socially isolated: immigrants, economically unstable, those recovering from substance abuse, or those in treatment for mental illness
  - Families who are homeless
  - "Young-young" mothers, between the ages of 13 and 16
  - Mothers with cognitive impairment
  - Mothers with a history of childhood abuse or trauma, depression, mental illness, substance abuse, or criminal history (or a mix as they are often all related)

- Families with children experiencing development issues who have a delay in identification, referral, evaluation, and ultimately enrollment in early intervention.
- Families with children who are experiencing developmental or behavioral issues who do not have access to needed resources and/or the wherewithal to negotiate service systems.
- Families who are disconnected from services or institutions such as medical homes, child health care providers, or the school system (for any of the above reasons).
- **How is there a positive change in the circumstances of these families?**
  - Mothers participating in the Nurturing Families Network program show statistically significant reductions in their risk for abuse, particularly in the area of rigid parenting.
  - Annualized rates of maltreatment for families receiving home visitation services during the past 8 years have ranged from a little over 1% to a little over 6%. This is well below the 20-25% seen in similarly high-risk families (Murphy et al., 1985; Stevens-Simon et al., 2001).
  - Help Me Grow families are successfully connected to services for the majority of referrals (average rate of 82% for the past 3 years). Families were mostly referred for: educational services, developmental monitoring, 211 Infoline services (basic needs, HUSKY health, child care), disability related services, and parent education programs.
  - Families with children in early elementary grades who are already showing signs of drop-out are receiving education in their homes on the importance of parent involvement in their children's education, and on school-related activities in the home such as reading, helping with homework, and maintaining regular routines.

Long term social and cost benefits of providing primary *prevention* and support for new parents and families with young children include: a decrease in the prevalence of families at risk for child abuse and neglect; better child health; improved school readiness and school success; improved mental health and family functioning; reduced arrests and convictions; greater workforce participation and reduction in public assistance.

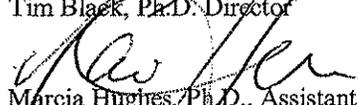
We understand the fiscal crisis the state is confronting, but it is particularly in times like these that the most vulnerable families in the state need to be protected – they lack personal and family safety nets that are essential to their well-being and must therefore rely upon the state for protections that so many of the rest of us take for granted. Abandoning services that have been proven to be successful and withdrawing the material and emotional support that 1000s of the most vulnerable families in the state rely on regularly is not only morally suspect, but will cost the state more money in the long run as the consequences of family instability become apparent. We can and must do better.

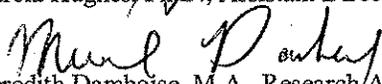
Please vote NO on December 15<sup>th</sup> to the Governor's plan.

Thank you –

Sincerely,

  
Tim Black, Ph.D. Director

  
Marcia Hughes, Ph.D., Assistant Director

  
Meredith Damboise, M.A., Research Associate