

**Testimony of Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager
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**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – December 09, 2009, 2:00 PM, Room 2C
Public Hearing on the Governor’s Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan and the Impact
of the Governor’s Rescissions**

My name is Gabriel Fonseca, Program Manager of three **Children’s Trust Fund programs and DSS Certified Fatherhood Initiative Program at Madonna Place**, a non-profit family support agency in Norwich. I am here today in opposition of the Governor’s plan to balance the budget on the backs of vulnerable citizens.

In these times, I ask you to weigh the consequences of not investing in programs that support children and families. The Children’s Trust Fund and the Department of Social Services have been a major supporter of our work with families for over 10 years. I manage a Nurturing Families Network program, a Family School Connection program, and the Fatherhood Initiative Program at Madonna Place. Across all of these programs, we supported over 250 families in the past year. My staff is made up of 13 dedicated, passionate and purpose driven professionals. All of our programs focus on improving the chances that children will have a promising future. I respectfully ask this committee to consider the return on invest that is possible from continuing the work of the Children’s Trust Fund, the Department of Social Services, and Madonna Place. Our programs have been shown to be effective and should be considered an asset to the state.

Our fatherhood program holds the John S. Martinez Award for Program Excellence since the certification process was implemented. Currently we are one of six certified fatherhood programs in our state. Last year, our program helped over 25 fathers find and keep a job. Also, we helped nearly 60 fathers and children increase the amount of time they spend together. Our program is the only DSS certified fatherhood program east of Hartford. Any cuts to our budget would greatly hinder our ability to support fathers. Without our support there would be no formal options for fathers. Research findings indicate that children from father-absent homes are five times more likely to live in poverty, 3 times more likely to fail in school, two to three times more likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems, and three times more likely to commit suicide. In addition, the main predictor of crime in a neighborhood is the percentage of homes without fathers. With the creation of the John S. Martinez Award for Program Excellence in 2004, Connecticut leads the nation in the area of supporting fathers and children. Allowing the Governor to cut funding for programs that support fathers and families will only set us back. The current Federal Administration has clearly indicated a commitment to support and expand funding for states that are dedicated to fatherhood. The Governor’s plan would send a negative message about our state’s priorities.

Our programs families in a strength based manner and we are results driven. We understand the difficult issues families face and we use a tactical approach to help them. Lat year, through the Children's Trust Fund programs I manage, our staff helped over 35 first time parents cope with the challenges of caring for their children and 10 parents of elementary aged children. Our work with those families was done in their homes. The home visit meetings are curriculum based. If the Governor's plan is approved all of the families we are working with will be left with no support within six months. Keep in mind all of these families are vulnerable and have been identified to be at risk for child abuse or neglect. Ceasing funding for these programs across the state would cause at least 15,000 families to be will be left with no support. What does this say about our state's priorities? Children should be seen as our most valuable assets.

To balance the state's budget by cutting community programs will greatly hurt our state. To most effectively work to reduce costly social problems like child poverty, child abuse, and fatherlessness in our state it is wise to use the foundation that was established by pioneers like John S. Martinez and the leaders from the Children's Trust Fund. A plan to balance the budget should not include cutting resources for at risk families. To cut spending and do little to examine how programs may produce state revenue or how some programs actually lead to reduced spending by preventing social problems makes absolutely no sense. I hope that this body of elected officials will use good judgment and vote to oppose the Governor's plan.

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