

**Testimony of Meredith Damboise
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Bill No. 839 An Act Concerning Mergers and Consolidations of various
state agencies**

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Meredith Damboise and I am the Project Manager at the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford. We have been evaluating the Nurturing Families Network program for fourteen years, as well as several other Children's Trust Fund programs. I am here to support the Children's Trust Fund in maintaining their independence from DCF.

Over the past 13 years, I have worked closely with the Children's Trust Fund to monitor and evaluate their program services. I have witnessed the staff's passion and determination in providing prevention services to some of our state's most vulnerable parents. The Children's Trust Fund's expertise in prevention services makes them not only the best equipped agency to oversee the programs, but I would argue, the only state agency that should be managing these services. Prevention philosophy is based on the belief that parents are capable of guiding their own self-development when given the information, support, encouragement, and community resources that are necessary to do so. Children's Trust Fund programs work not only to improve the quality of parenting but also to strengthen the family unit. It is this non-punitive, supportive attitude that makes families feel comfortable enough to open their homes and lives to these programs. I

cannot imagine that the experience would be the same if the programs were moved to DCF.

In order for a large program like NFN to work effectively, program quality and fidelity must be monitored on a regular basis. The Children's Trust Fund has staff dedicated to overseeing their many programs. They routinely provide technical assistance, training, and support. The NFN's Continuous Quality Improvement Team is an excellent example of how the Children's Trust Fund has brought their agency together with practitioners and researchers to develop and modify program practices, based on programmatic experience, as well as local and national research in prevention. If the programs were moved to DCF, this level of quality assurance and model fidelity would be impossible to maintain and program services would most likely deteriorate.

In conclusion, prevention programs do not belong at an agency designed for enforcing child protection; the philosophy and practices simply do not match. Moreover, the infrastructure necessary to keep these programs effective would not be present and in the end, the programs and Connecticut most vulnerable families would suffer.