

I would like to thank the chairs and committee members for allowing me to speak with regard to Bill 839.

My name is Susan Forbes and I am employed by the State of CT as the Manager of the Commission on Child Protection, however, I have received permission and am addressing you as a private citizen to discuss my personal experience with the Children's Trust Fund.

My daughter is currently in her junior year of high school and she is also a teenage mother. I knew this was going to be a huge challenge for her and for me. I also knew I could provide *her* with advice and information she needed as a new mother but accepted the fact that she may not always open up and tell me *her* feelings. I wanted a program where she would receive information on parenting skills and one she felt comfortable opening up to. However, there was one catch, it could not be part of or associated with DCF. In addition to my job experiences, my mother was a DCF SW for over 20 years, so we are well informed with the perception of young teenage parents.

DCF is a strong agency in protecting abused & neglected children and Connecticut's children should have a strong arm of protection. However, their duty to prevent any possible harm to children influences every decision they make and puts people on the defensive.

A program like Nurturing Families Network, which is meant to prevent any neglect or abuse from occurring, should not be part of the agency that is responsible for investigating allegations of neglect or abuse and has the power to remove children. I don't want my daughter to have that kind of pressure or worry while she works with her home visitor to become a good parent. The potential for DCF to overreach is too great and its motivation to avoid any blame for possible neglect may cloud its judgment when dealing with young parents. My daughter and I have discussed the possibility that this program may merge with DCF and I've already advised her not to participate if this occurs. And you know what, this is probably the first time without hesitation she has agreed with my advice. She already knew any involvement with DCF as teenage parent would not be on a positive level.