



University of Connecticut  
*School of Social Work*

February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Select Committee on Children (Senators Musto, Meyer, Boucher, and Representatives Urban, Jarmoc, Mioli, Mushinsky, Thompson, Hovery, and Alberts)

My name is Doctor Brenda Kurz. I am a resident of West Hartford and an Associate Professor at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, where I am in my tenth year of teaching. I worked for several years as a clinical social worker at Duke University with primarily low-income children and their families. My area of research is the mental well-being of low-income mothers of young children, particularly as it relates to these mothers' ability to care for their children. My clinical experience and the literature are replete with examples of the devastating impact that impaired maternal well-being can have on children, which can range on a continuum from relatively mild deprivation to extreme emotional or physical abuse that warrants removal from the parent's care, an outcome that we, of course, want to prevent, and the reason I am here today.

The Legislature's Select Committee on Children is proposing that The Nurturing Families Network be expanded to reach all single parents with an income below the poverty line, a program that as currently administered by the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) is effective at promoting positive parenting, reducing incidences of abuse and neglect, assisting new parents to remain in school and/or find employment and childcare. I support this expansion, with the condition that the program continue to be administered by the Children's Trust Fund (its current site). The Children's Trust Fund has a proven record of effectiveness, as indicated by the University of Hartford's evaluations. Staff at all levels are committed, responsible, and open. In other words, the Children's Trust Fund as is, is working well. There is no reason to assume that the same results will occur if the programs are moved to DCF, as has been proposed by the Governor as one of her cost cutting measures. In fact, there is reason to speculate otherwise as follows.

Rightly or wrongly, DCF and those affiliated with it are stigmatized, an unfortunate reality inevitably associated with the fact that DCF has the power and ability to remove children from people's home, and we (meaning the general public) know this. In addition, help seeking is also frequently stigmatized. Parents and mothers in particular, are often reluctant to seek services, even supportive services under the best of circumstances. If the programs like The Nurturing Families Network which is currently offered by the Children's Trust Fund were offered by DCF as a result of the Governor's proposed legislation, then there will likely be a decline in the use of these preventive services, and a corresponding increase in abuse and neglect and costs.

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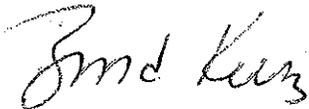
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The fear of losing custody of one's children is often cited in the literature as a barrier to women entering treatment. On the other hand, motherhood may be strong motivator to accept help, but this won't occur without trust. Don't we want to maximize trust and minimize fear? If so, allow the Children's Trust Fund to continue and let it continue to administer the Nurturing Families Network program.

Connecticut currently has a strong agency, the Children's Trust Fund, with a well-trained and effective staff doing primary preventive work that is demonstrating positive results. This is not the time to squeeze these resources for short-term gain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Kurz".

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