

Good Afternoon, my name is Jennifer Hernandez and I am the Program Manager for the Nurturing Families Network at the Hospital of Central Connecticut, New Britain General. Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of the program and the proposed Bill #5144 for the Children's Trust Fund.

First, let me start by acknowledging that I understand that the tasks at hand for each of you in regards to this fiscal climate is difficult and I send my thoughts with each of you as you diligently explore ways for us to move forward appropriately. Furthermore, I also recognize that in this challenging time it is difficult to wrap our minds around the idea of expanding any state services. However, my purpose here today is to urge you as you explore projected growth areas to consider Nurturing Families Network as a viable, cost effective option for preventing child abuse and neglect in Connecticut.

The Nurturing Families Network is funded by the Children's Trust Fund, (CTF) a state agency created with the mission of preventing child abuse and neglect. The Nurturing Families Network is unique in that our families many poor, and young begin services just as they are beginning their journey as parents. Our idea is to provide parents with a "tool box" to pull from in their new role as a parent so that they may have as successful of an experience as possible given their circumstances. The options they learn provide them with real skills to make choices that can keep intervention services out of their lives.

Today I don't have exact numbers of savings for you. I do have however, have a few thoughts for you to consider. Our site in New Britain has two home visitors and one supervisor. We serve about thirty-five mothers a year in home visiting, which really finically comes out to about an estimated forty five dollars a week per family. Forty five dollars a week is a night a Ruby Tuesdays for two with a cocktail. We serve our families for up to five years. That comes out to just over eleven thousand dollars. Here is your cost savings. Eleven thousand dollars to prevent a child abuse from happening, to prevent children from having to grow up with the scars that will always be with them.

Our program in New Britain is reaching its ten year mark. We have had no staff turn over and pride ourselves that though we do not make a lot of money we are making long-term differences in the lives of families. All of the staff are very skilled workers and each of us work second jobs to support are own families while continuing to commit to the mission of this program. We ourselves are a cost savings to the state of Connecticut. In addition, we have had several five year graduating families and look forward to seeing more year after year. Our families are changing their lives.

I stopped doing any outreach for our program and regularly have to apologize to other community sites for not being able to take any more clients. We rarely have opening and we are sought out as a place of hope and change for our community. Our high school alone has more then thirty five expectant teen mothers. Forget the idea of o my God, that many expectant mothers, they have already decided to raise their children and they need help. I currently have three of those expectant mothers in home visiting. What about the rest? Our families are all under the poverty level; many have experienced generational poverty and are generational teen parents. When does it stop? We truly believe Nurturing Families Network's mission has the ability to change families' lives; to stop the generational issues by equipping our families with the right tools.

We know that children living in abuse struggle to rid themselves from the affects of child abuse for many years. Some of us perhaps have just missed being a part of these struggles. I also know that some of us have also not escaped them. So we know the long term cost. Regardless, we all know that the lasting affect of child abuse and neglect haunt individuals well into adult lives. The scars are always there and with a lot of work and support maybe we can help them heal, but they are always there. All of us can recall a moment in our lives that left us with scars. I am confident of that. Why not provide the opportunity to prevent that if we have the right tools. It makes sense and in doing so can save millions of dollars in long-term in mental health and rehabilitation services.

The Children's Trust Fund has made remarkable efforts in developing primary prevention programs. As you diligently work through this session, I challenge you to consider that the seed has been planted for a larger scale expansion when the timing is right and that with the expansion we can improve are fiscal outcomes by investing in prevention.

"An Act Concerning An Appropriation to Expand the Nurturing Families Network Program."