

**Testimony of Laura Amenta,
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**Prepared for the Select Committee on Children
Public Hearing - Thursday, February 26, 2009**

Good Morning. My name is Laura Amenta and I am the Chair of the Children's Trust Fund Council.

On behalf of the Council, I am here to testify in support of **Raised Bill 5144 - AN ACT CONCERNING AN APPROPRIATION TO EXPAND THE NURTURING FAMILIES NETWORK PROGRAM.**

Nurturing Families Network is a hallmark program of the Connecticut's Children's Trust Fund. The program provides intensive home visiting services to high risk families at a critical time in their lives - when a child is born.

In addition to caring for a new baby, the families in this program face numerous challenges including domestic violence, maternal depression and substance abuse. They are usually headed by single mothers with limited family support. They tend to be socially isolated, live in inadequate housing, have little education and few jobs. They tend to be young and 90% receive Medicaid.

The *Nurturing Families Network* program focuses on home visiting because this approach has been shown to successfully do a number of important things:

- engage a difficult and hard-to-reach population,
- reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect,
- develop parent-child relationships,
- and improve outcomes for both parents and children.

The *Nurturing Families* group program has received proven program status through the Office of Juvenile Justice.

Nurturing Families Network is rigorously evaluated by the University of Hartford School of Social Research.

A number of evaluations have found that children whose parents participate in a home visiting program have better birth outcomes, stronger literacy skills, more social competence, and higher levels of school readiness than their peers whose parents were not enrolled in this type of program.

Evaluations have also shown significant achievements for parents who participate in home visiting programs. These include gains in employment and education, stable households, and access to health care.

Nurturing Families Network is a program that can help more families and more children have a better life.

At the current time, *Nurturing Families Network* provides services to first-time mothers giving birth at all of the twenty-nine birthing hospitals in our state. Services are offered at forty-two locations with expanded programs in the cities of Hartford and New Haven. Roughly fifteen hundred (1,500) new parents are reached each year. When combined with parents already enrolled in the program, the total population receiving home visits reaches approximately 5,000 at-risk parents.

The proposed bill before this committee would expand the *Nurturing Families Network* to encompass all single parents who have an income at or below the federal poverty level, a projected population of 10,000 annual births.

Members of the Trust Fund Council strongly support this bill.

Given *Nurturing Families Network's* track record in helping high risk families nurture their children and its ability to prevent child abuse and neglect, it makes ultimate sense to expand this program.

The strategies of *Nurturing Families Network* give Connecticut a better chance of keeping children safe in their own homes and out of child protective services and the juvenile justice systems. Additionally cost-benefit analysis show that for every \$1 the state spends on prevention it saves \$6 in remediation services proving the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure.