

City of New Haven, Health Department, Nurturing Families Network

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

February 11, 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public testimony regarding the Governor's proposal to drastically reduce funding for the Nurturing Families Network program. My name is Kathleen Hagearty. I am the Clinical Supervisor for the Nurturing Families Network program at the Maternal and Child Services, City of New Haven Health Department. I am here to let you know how strongly we believe the vital prevention services the Nurturing Families program provides cannot continue effectively with the proposed drastic cut in funding. Our city would be reduced from eight to just two hospital based sites. These sites themselves will be severely reduced as will the dozens of NFN programs across the state. Through a strong network of community based sites we are able to creatively reach out to a diverse group of first time mothers and fathers, provide much needed home visiting, prenatal and parenting groups and telephone support. We believe the decision to cut 30% of the funding and eliminate the non-hospital sites are not in the best interests of Connecticut's taxpayers, program participants, or staff.

As a public health agency we work to promote good health care every day and to reduce future risks and costs. We are one of three cities in the state to receive private funding to systemically address health disparities in our community with the establishment of the Health Equities Alliance. New Haven and our nation have already recognized that confronting obesity and diabetes in our community will not only lower our residents' health risks but also reduce the cost of related care. The Children's Trust Fund and their Nurturing Families Network program provides a coordinated, tested prevention model to educate and serve Connecticut parents, particularly those at highest risk for abuse and neglect. Instead of high cost intervention remedies the NFN model gives us the

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opportunity to intervene in the lives of parents from prior to the birth of their child and for the first five years of their lives.

As you may know, our staff use best practices and evidence based research to provide information and education through intensive home visiting, prenatal and parenting groups. Home visiting is not just dropping in on a new parent, it is a thoughtful planned time where a family can learn new skills and risks are identified and addressed. Just this past week, our staff began work with a mom who has cognitive limitations, a first time father who wants to be very involved in his child's life while also maintaining a full time split shift job, and a young woman who, when asked what she hoped to gain from us said: "I really don't want my child to have the childhood I had. I want help to be a good mom". New Haven's NFN services were able to expand in late 2007 to a total of eight sites serving the greater New Haven area. Last year the New Haven sites were given the opportunity to target services specifically to involve fathers and other male caregivers. The Children's Trust Fund has well documented that our unique home visiting services and the more recent and innovative Fatherhood Initiative make a real impact in people's lives and are cost effective. As we assess the impact of the recession on children, confront domestic violence in our community, and push for school reform, we must not leave behind the opportunity to make positive changes from the beginning of life.

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