

Testimony for the Public Hearing on the Governor's Budget Adjustments
February 11, 2010

My name is Diana Thibodeau and for over 20 years I have been providing services to communities of North Central CT. I am writing this testimonial as the Program Director of Family Support and Prevention Services at a Community Based Behavioral Health agency in Enfield. One of the programs I oversee is the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) Program. I have seen first hand the positive outcomes that programs like home visiting, parenting education, support and advocacy deliver. From this experience, I am unable to comprehend how the proposed budget cut to the programs of the Children's Trust Fund under the office of Department of Social Services will be a cost effective benefit to the State of Connecticut.

The Governor's Budget Adjustments will have a distressing effect on the entire Children's Trust Fund programs, but most affected will be the Nurturing Families Network Program. In addition to the elimination of the Hartford and New Haven expansion sites all remaining 29 NFN programs associated with birthing hospitals will see a 30% reduction in funding.

The Nurturing Families Network provides weekly home visitation to first time parents at risk for child abuse and neglect. Currently, every first time family in the State of CT has the opportunity for a Nurturing Connections Coordinator to visit them in the hospital shortly after the birth of their baby. They are offered education, resources and/or supportive telephone contact by trained volunteers. These services focus upon increasing the parent-infant bond, learning child development information and screening infants and young children for the possibility of developmental delays. In addition, there are Nurturing Group Programs in the community that deliver evidenced based parenting education curriculum to parents and provide skill building activities for their children. Some of these groups target fathers, teen parents or pregnant women.

In the State of CT, the Nurturing Families Network reaches more than 4,000 first time families annually. Included in these numbers are families who are touched by poverty, mental illness, and addiction. Statistics indicate that the rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect in high risk families receiving home visitation is significantly lower than state or national rates. For NFN families, the rate is on average 3% compared to 20% for families not participating in this type of program. This program is cost effective. It costs just over \$3,000 per year for intensive home visiting as compared with \$30,000 annually for each substantiated DCF case.

The Governor's Proposed Budget will not only affect currently enrolled and future families, it would also have a significant impact on the providers of these services. During a time when Connecticut's unemployment rate is staggering, the funding cuts to the Nurturing Families Network and other programs of the Children's Trust Fund would precipitate a loss of employment for hundreds of individuals living in Connecticut.

We cannot rely on further spending cuts to programs that provide services to our most vulnerable citizens in order to balance the budget. Common sense and research tells us that if you put effort into insulating your home, you will save on heating. If you have regular teeth cleaning appointments, you prevent cavities. Common sense also tells us that putting a band-aide on an infected wound will not stop the infection. Prevention programs like the Nurturing Families Network work and helps families become productive citizens of our state.

The Children's Trust Fund has over 10 years of research data that confirms that families involved in the Nurturing Families Network programs have increased knowledge, developed skills, and have acquired good attitudes about raising competent and healthy children that also are more prepared to attend to their education. With great respect, I submit this testimony and ask for your support of The Children's Trust Fund and in turn, the thousands of families we serve.