

Testimony Regarding Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan
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Good evening. I am from the Center for Social Research at the University of Hartford and we have been studying home visitation in Connecticut for the past 15 years.

In 2006 and 2008, the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) home visitation program was expanded in Hartford and New Haven, with a similar vision planned for Bridgeport. The reason for the expansion was simple – to concentrate services in our largest cities where poverty and vulnerability are likewise concentrated. Our cities are among the poorest in the country and the concentrations of child poverty in our urban cores are striking. For instance, of all poor children five years of age or younger living in the 21-town New Haven region, 62% live in the city of New Haven. Similarly, 60% of poor children in the Hartford 17-town region live in the city.

The Governor's deficit mitigation would reduce funds to all NFN home visiting programs by 30%, but it would eliminate 14 program sites in New Haven and Hartford. Almost 700 mothers a year in New Haven and Hartford would lose these services, 95% of whom are racial minorities, 91% single, 76% unemployed, and 46% without a high school education

The NFN home visitation program sends trained home visitors into the homes of our most vulnerable families throughout the state at the time of the mothers' first births. Home visitors develop healthy relationships with vulnerable parents whom they see on average two to four times a month, help them bond with and facilitate the development of their children, help them cope with a range of problems, many associated with poverty,

help them achieve their educational and employment goals, and provide a constant source of support and guidance to these mothers.

The program has been carefully developed over the past 15 years, utilizing research to enhance program practices – we know because we are members of the research team. Because of coordinated efforts with the Children’s Trust Fund, the NFN research committee (which includes researchers from UConn and Yale) and key legislators, the program has expanded to all 29 birthing hospitals in the state, has focused services in areas where the greatest needs exist, serves around 2000 vulnerable families each year, and has demonstrated a wide range of positive outcomes. Consider, for instance, that among our most vulnerable families in the state, only 1.3% of participating families in 2008 had substantiated cases of state reported child neglect, and there were no cases of child abuse -- an astonishing achievement.

Prevention programs like NFN home visitation help to stabilize families living in excruciating circumstances. State money invested in the front end saves money in the back end when families are diverted from more expensive services needed to treat family dysfunction, juvenile delinquency, poor health, or educational problems.

Difficult fiscal times call for difficult decisions. But making cuts in programs that have demonstrated effectiveness through carefully designed research and eliminating program services where they are needed most is misguided. It withdraws badly needed support in fragile urban neighborhoods and ultimately misleads taxpayers.

Thank you.