

March 11, 2010

Testimony against Governor's Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan

I am Karen Steinberg Gallucci, a clinical psychologist faculty member at University of Connecticut Health Center, and an early childhood researcher. I direct two programs funded by the Children's Trust Fund: a Nurturing Families site at UConn Health Center and a Maternal Depression Project, aimed at providing in-home evidence-based treatment for mothers of young children with clinical depression. I am here tonight because I am astounded and deeply dismayed about the Governor's proposed deficit mitigation plan and choice of budgetary cuts. This proposal is extremely concerning and will have far-reaching costs and damage to Connecticut families and hardworking citizens, including loss of needed and invaluable services, and many, many job losses. You must not cut the Children's Trust Fund any further. Their programs work. They prevent child maltreatment and result in overall savings to our state. These programs reach 18,000 families per year. Compare the cost of \$3000 for the most expensive service (home visitation for high risk families) to \$30,000 per family per year, once they become referred for child protective services.

This proposal takes us back many decades to times when we, as a nation, were much less knowledgeable and didn't value children, our most precious resource and among our most vulnerable citizens. During the 1800's children were considered the property of their parents. We have a history of being able to torture or even kill children for disobedience to their parents. Furthermore, we had an agency designated to protect animals from cruel treatment before we formed an organization for guarding children's safety.

We now know about the devastating effects of child maltreatment on brain development, social, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, academic development & functioning in the short & long-term. The evidence is incontrovertible and overwhelming. Please, let's not go back there. We are more enlightened. We are better than that. Early intervention and prevention work. They save money in the long run. They should be considered basic, standard, and de rigueur in an enlightened society. These programs of the Children's Trust Fund are essential, required, critical, and imperative. They are not optional, disposable, discretionary.

The proposal under consideration reflects short-sighted thinking. It is backward, regressive, heartless, and, frankly, shameful. Don't sign on because you are overwhelmed, have come to feel desperate and hopeless about the economy, or have bought in to this mentality and come to viewing this proposal as a reasonable solution. There are other much better options and potential solutions. Take a look at some of the ideas for budget savings proposed by Better Choices for Connecticut in their state budget plan. Perhaps this could involve increasing certain taxes, such as for alcohol and tobacco. Or closing corporate tax loopholes. Wouldn't these be preferable to more job losses which will further sink our struggling economy?

Please, I implore you to think very carefully. Children's lives are at stake. Connecticut families and hardworking citizens will suffer immeasurably. Please, you must vote against this proposal. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Karen Steinberg Gallucci