

**Testimony of Laura Amenta,  
Chair, Connecticut's Children's Trust Fund Council  
135 Red Hill Drive, Glastonbury, CT 06033  
(860) 836-5800 [jacqia@aol.com](mailto:jacqia@aol.com)**

**Prepared for the Select Committee on Children  
Public Hearing – Thursday, March 4, 2010**

---

Good afternoon. My name is Laura Amenta and I am the chair of The Children's Trust Fund Council.

The Children's Trust Fund is Connecticut's lead department charged with preventing child abuse and neglect and ensuring the positive growth and development of children.

On behalf of the council, I applaud the efforts of this committee to put more in place to support families and children during the recession.

I am here today to urge you to consider adding the Children's Trust Fund to the proposed Children in a Recession team and to include in this Bill the Trust Fund's programs which address the social and emotional stress families are under in order to prevent it from turning into abuse and neglect.

I draw your attention specifically to lines 17 – 21 in the bill which seek to

- 1) Mitigate the long term impact of economic recession on children
- 2) Provide appropriate assistance and resources to families to minimize the number of children who enter poverty and the impact of the recession that extends into adulthood through lost earning and poor health (line 18)
- 3) Prevent human and fiscal costs of recessions including.... child abuse and neglect

The Children's Trust Fund's Nurturing Families Network encompasses all these strategies. The Nurturing Families Network home visitation program has been statistically proven to make a significant difference in strengthening the lives of families it serves. The program offers intensive support for high risk and hard to reach families living in poverty.

Home visitors work against a backdrop of unwanted babies, domestic violence, the recession, and the high potential for abuse and neglect. Evaluations of Nurturing Families Network have found:

- Early identification of developmental delays and health issues through regular screening.

- Program participants made statistically significant gains in life course outcomes including education, employment, and self sufficient living.
- Program participants experienced a significant decrease in parental frustration and sadness, and an increase in coping and stress management skills.
- Annualized rate of child abuse and neglect among program participants at high risk under 1.4% - far lower than the expected rate of 22%.

Studies of similar programs show that children benefit in several additional ways.

There is evidence that home visitation improves school readiness. One study (conducted by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) found that children enrolled in preschool whose families participated in home visitation - scored significantly higher on all measures of intelligence, achievement, and language ability than children in comparison group whose families did not receive home visitation.

Research has shown long-term benefits – resulting in reduced rates of tobacco and alcohol abuse, episodes of running away, behavioral problems, arrests, convictions, and sexual promiscuity among teenagers. (David Olds 15 year follow-up – Elmira Home Visiting Program 1998).

In a stable economy the work of the Trust Fund has numerous benefits, but in a recession our work becomes even more valuable. The work of the Trust Fund is part of a core safety net and a first response to families under stress. Nurturing Families Network, Family School Connection, Help me Grow, The Kinship and Respite Funds - all address the fiscal, social and emotional stress families are under in order to prevent it from turning into abuse and neglect.

This committee is working to put more in place to support families and children during the recession. At the same time, I am at a loss to understand why the current administration is proposing cutting key safety nets like Nurturing Families Network that can mitigate the impact of a recession.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have studied the effects of recession on children and concluded that safety nets are necessary. Safety- nets put into place during the 1974- 75 recession worked to keep all trends favorable including infant-mortality rates, participation in prenatal care and infant-feeding programs, which are measures of hunger and malnutrition. The researchers concluded that this was because the mid-70's was a period of expansion of Great Society programs. Safety-nets put into place worked.

In contrast the policy response of the Reagan Administration was the opposite. As the 1981-82 recession deepened, programs affecting the poor were cut back. Since fifty-one percent of the poor are children, they paid the heaviest price in that recession.

One of the worst trends from the 81-82 recession was a rise in child abuse, closely associated with unemployment, economic hardship and stress on parents. This trend is surfacing in the current recession. Child abuse is up sharply, and infant-mortality rates are increasing in parts of the nation particularly hard hit by the recession.

Line 43 of this bill calls for creating and implementing a plan to identify and support families who are at risk of abuse or neglect in a declining economy. I offer that the Trust Fund is already doing just that. Legislators in Connecticut must stand up and support proven strategies such as home visitation that will protect our children in this recession.