

Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, R.N., M.S, Executive Director  
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**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing – March 4, 2011  
Public Hearing on the Governor's Budget**

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Dear Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am the Executive Director of Madonna Place, a non-profit located in Norwich that serves over 2600 children and parents each year from primarily New London County. My agency receives funding for a DSS fatherhood program and three services which are funded by the Children's Trust Fund.

I am concerned about the proposed cut to fatherhood programming in the DSS budget – which will eliminate funding to the six certified programs in this State.

A little history is important to understand the funding problem.

- Public Act 99-103 established the State of Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative, which led to funding of three pilot programs by DSS, the lead agency for this Initiative, in 2000. (Madonna Place was one of the pilots)
- The State continued the pilot program after the successful three year pilot, although the funding was reduced.
- In 2006, DSS received a large federal grant as a result of the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Program; five and then six certified fatherhood programs across the State were funded under this five year initiative; Madonna Place was one of the programs. The State was required to commit partial match dollars in order to get this funding and utilized the State funding. The federal funding will end in September of 2011 and there is uncertainty about the future of this funding.
- The Obama administration has expressed full support for funding more funding initiatives for fatherhood, and currently in his budget there is a line item for extending the current initiative another year. However, the State of Connecticut will be unable to apply for this funding extension or any other grant if there is no money allocated, because of short-sighted planning. The line item that had the funding for the Fatherhood Initiative Funds has been completely eliminated. 195,000 is the minimum required and is divided equally among the six programs. (32,500 each)

You have heard from others tonight about the importance of this work and what has been accomplished. Fatherlessness is connected with many poor outcomes for children and families; while the opposite holds true for positive fatherhood involvement. One of the best ways to fight childhood poverty is to have a father in the picture who is contributing financially to the family. The great thing about this work that is very different than so many other things in the human service field is that there actually is a cure – you can fix the problem of fatherlessness. Most fathers want a good relationship with their children and want to be contributing to their child's financial well being. In the words of the former DSS Commissioner, Patricia Wilson Coker, many fathers who are struggling to support their children are actually "dead broke" and not "dead beat".

We plan to meet with the Governor's staff to discuss this matter because I am quite sure if he was made aware of what was at stake, this proposed cut would not be in the budget. Since it is now in your hands, I would ask that you restore the 195,000 to the DSS for fatherhood programming so we can continue this important investment in fathers, children and families. Please don't throw away the years of good work and the reputation that the State of Connecticut has as leader in this Country in providing services to fathers.

- I would also ask that you continue your history of support of the Children's Trust Fund and restore funding to the Nurturing Network sites in Hartford and New Haven. Cutting services to – two cities with the highest rate of poverty and at-risk families – will likely result in costing the state more in mandatory spending for children who end up as DCF cases due to a lack of prevention services.

Thank-you for your time and attention and for your careful consideration of these matters.