

Testimony Regarding Governor's Deficit Mitigation Plan
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Good evening. My name is Meredith Damboise and 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 16 years.

In 2005 and 2007, 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.

The Governor's proposal would eliminate 13 NFN program sites in New Haven and Hartford. Almost 600 mothers a year in New Haven and Hartford would lose these services, over 90% of whom are racial minorities, 90% single, 77% unemployed, and 46% without a high school education.

The program has been carefully developed over the past 16 years, utilizing both national and local 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 also 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 nearly 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 2% of

participating families in 2009 had substantiated cases of state reported child abuse/neglect-- an astonishing achievement.

Prevention programs like NFN home visitation help to stabilize families living in excruciating circumstances. State money invested in the front end through home visiting saves money in the back end when families are diverted from more expensive services needed to treat abuse and neglect, 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 areas that need them the most, our fragile urban neighborhoods.

Thank you.