

Burns, Vanessa

From: Elizabeth Keliar [ekeliar@vnascc.org]
Sent: Monday, February 28, 2011 11:28 AM
To: AppropriationTestimony; Senator Harp; Rep. Walker, Toni; Senator Looney; Senator Williams; Rep. Donovan, Christopher; Sen. Roraback, Andrew; Sen. McKinney, John; Sen. Fasano, Len; 'lawrence.cafero@housegop.state.ct.us'
Cc: 'CTFCouncil@aol.com'
Subject: Attention: Regarding Nurturing Families Network in the Proposed Budget

Please allow me to introduce myself-my name is Elizabeth Keliar and I am a Home Visitor for the Nurturing Families Network at the VNA/SCC Site of New Haven. Although our particular site is not included in the Governor's proposed budget, I feel that it is extremely important to be a voice for our New Haven and Hartford sites that are in danger of losing funding and being eliminated.

Nurturing Families Network, Connecticut's leading voluntary child abuse and neglect prevention program, is made up of three key components-Nurturing Connections, Nurturing Parenting Groups, and Home Visiting. Families who receive home visitation services are at the most risk for abuse and neglect. Nurturing Families Network partners with the University of Hartford's Center for Social Research as our program is evidence based and research continues to support our services as they are beneficial to our families and communities. As a home visitor for Nurturing Families, I see first hand the extreme need for and importance of child abuse and neglect prevention programs for Connecticut's families. Through our services, families gain an understanding of how to make choices which empower and strengthen their families, not impair them. Families learn the importance of not shaking their child as it can lead to extreme physical and emotional harm and even death, learn risk factors of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, how to nurture the parent-child relationship, how to discipline and not punish their child, how to identify learning delays, and positive ways to navigate through some of life's challenges such as transportation difficulties, employment, and education for themselves and their children.

But Nurturing Families is more than a parent education, support, resources and referral program-we are a lifeline and a means of guiding families down a positive path to the future. For many of our families, we are the single source of social connection they have and the only support to guide them through their parenting journey and general life journey. We may service families from the time they are prenatal until their first born child turns 5 years old. Before their graduation from the program, we empower families and give them the tools to make positive choices in their lives and the lives of their children. We assist families in the search for pediatricians, OBGYNs, dentists and other vital health care providers that they may otherwise not understand are important. We support families in finding quality childcare and preschool programs and sometimes necessary services for special needs such as Birth to 3 and encourage them to find supplemental support through utilizing 211 Infoline. Some families receive the support to obtain high school, post-secondary trainings, and college degrees while in our program which carry them to positive paths for themselves and their families. Many families obtain and maintain general employment and careers. In fact, many families become financially self sufficient enough to end State assistance, whether it is SNAP, WIC, Unemployment, or TANF. All of these accomplishments and incredibly positive steps may not have been taken if it were not for the services of Nurturing Families as we are their support and their gateway to gaining education about resources and services. What this ultimately means is giving our families the tools they need to 'raise' themselves and raise competent, self-sufficient, responsible children who go on to complete higher education and become positive and productive members of society.

I once had a family whose inspirational story highlights the importance of Nurturing Families and the ways in which our services help change families lives. When I began working with this particular

mom, she had just moved back to Connecticut with her 1 long old baby, was homeless, jobless, had extremely minimal support, and was ending her marriage. Unemployment has been noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics to be one of the risk factors leading to child abuse and neglect as lack of employment leads to extreme financial and emotional stress for many families (<http://www.news-medical.net/news/20101004/Increase-in-unemployment-rate-linked-to-child-maltreatment.aspx>). In our time working together, we would meet for visits once a week and never once missed a visit. Through education, resources and gaining motivation and strength through support, this mom was able to find light in an extremely stressful situation as she obtained stable housing, childcare, began her career in a helping field of work, and is no longer in need of State financial services.

Nurturing Families Network is the main child abuse and neglect prevention program in our state for a reason-this prevention program works, but we are so much more than that. The Governor has proposed to eliminate funding for our non-hospital sites in New Haven and Hartford-two of the neediest cities in our state. Losing our program there would be devastating to our current families and future families. We understand the fiscal realities but whatever funding is salvaged from eliminating some NFN sites will eventually end up with DCF and other intervention services-eliminating some NFN sites does not save the state money, it creates need for more money in more desperate ways. Please consider this when it comes time to vote.

Thank you greatly for your time-your attention and consideration means the world to our families.

Liz

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