

Testimony of Patrick Sheehan-Gaumer
Fatherhood Initiative
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Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – March 4, 2011
Public Hearing on the Governor's Budget

Good evening Committee Members. My name is Patrick Sheehan-Gaumer. I'm here to ask you to reinstate the funding for the Fatherhood Initiative.

Since 2002, CT has shown a dedication to fatherhood involvement, to improving Connecticut's families and our children's well being. Please let this work continue.

The State of Connecticut has given \$195,000 a year over the last five years to the Fatherhood Initiative. That money has allowed us access to \$1,000,000 in Federal funds annually- \$5 million in total. Without the State's matching funds, we cannot access that federal money. Leaving the Governor's proposed budget as is, without any support for the Fatherhood Initiative, would result in the dismantling of the State Certified Fatherhood Initiative programs around the State.

Having an engaged father has incredible benefits to a child. Kids with engaged fathers are more likely to do well in school, graduate high school and go on to college, not engage in criminal behavior, not use illegal drugs, and have high self-esteem. Dads who are more engaged in their children's lives are more likely to pay child support, stay out of jail, and be responsible members of their respective communities. Besides the monetary benefits of less children on EBT and lower recidivism rates, the State benefits from having more successful families. The late former State Rep. John S. Martinez started the Fatherhood Initiative in 2002 because he knew that a state that dedicates itself to improving families is investing in the future. A small amount of money now will help create a future generation that will help our state thrive.

I'm a Case Manager/Group Facilitator at Madonna Place in Norwich. Madonna Place works to end child abuse. In the Fatherhood Initiative program, we work to support all dads. Many men that we work with have limited time with their children for various reasons. Our goal is to remove all of the barriers that exist between our dads and their kids. Common barriers are physical distance, a lack of active child support payments, drug or alcohol addiction, conflict between mom and dad, and a need for understanding proper childhood development. We provide a number of groups a week and offer one on one case management to help men address these problems. We serve over 150 fathers a year in Southeastern Connecticut.

As the only Fatherhood Initiative program east of Hartford it is clear that these men need more support, not less. We receive referrals every week from DCF and the Child Support division of Family Court. Cutting out Fatherhood would put more work on them and would leave a hole in resources for men involved in these state services.

We understand that the State is in a dire financial situation, and that you are responsible for getting us back to a healthier place. We know that means cuts. We ask that you trim the tree, not chop it down. Anything less than the \$195,000 makes us ineligible for any of the federal Fatherhood dollars. Please don't end the Fatherhood Initiative. Show Connecticut's kids that we believe in every parent being involved in their lives.