

March 4th, 2011

In Support of the Nurturing Families Network

Governor's Proposed Budget: 25% cut to the Children's Trust Fund's budget, reducing the budget by \$3.2 million -eliminate funding for the Nurturing Families Network at non-hospital sites in New Haven and Hartford.

Good afternoon. My name is Julia Gonzalez Candela and I am the clinical supervisor at the Nurturing Families site at the UConn Health Center. I previously worked for 6 years Family Life Education as a clinical supervisor for their Nurturing Families Program, one of the sites in Hartford that would lose funding if this proposal is accepted.

In the work I do, I feel that every day and with every new family I gain new understanding about how the Nurturing Families Program helps these families and how it adapts to their unique needs. I realize that we tend to take for granted many of the things we had when we were growing up. I am not only talking about material needs. I am talking about the presence of a trusted family member that we could rely on, trust, lean on, and count on. Most of the families that we work with in this program don't know that. The one thing that I don't take for granted is that the families we work with want to be better, want to be good mothers and fathers, they want to learn, and want the best for their children like anyone else. I don't take for granted the fact that they open their doors and their lives and trust us in their search for the answers and the path to reach their goals. I don't take for granted that we, Nurturing Families, become that someone they can count on.

Preventing child abuse and neglect is an enormous task. Nurturing Families has shown itself to be an effective model to reduce the incidence of child abuse across Connecticut. Statewide Nurturing Families programs had a child abuse and neglect rate of 1.3 per 100 on 2008 and 2.0 per 100 in 2009 compared to the 11.2 state rate and 19.0 in Hartford.

We know that the best way to reduce cost is prevention. Preventing that a child is neglected or abused, preventing that a family disintegrates, and preventing the consequences that these traumatic events bring, is the best way to reduce cost in child protective services, foster care, child and mother health care, rehabilitation, early intervention and special education, legal services, mental health, and in many cases the continuation of the cycle of drug abuse, family violence, criminal activity, teen pregnancy, etc.

The evidence about the devastating effects of child maltreatment is overwhelming. The research and finding show that prevention programs, like Nurturing Families, are the most effective way to reduce child maltreatment and therefore many other physical and emotional consequences. One example of the research and the findings is the ACE study.

"The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is one of the largest investigations ever conducted to assess associations between childhood maltreatment and later-life

health and well-being. The study is a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego.

More than 17,000 Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) members undergoing a comprehensive physical examination chose to provide detailed information about their childhood experience of abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction. To date, more than 50 scientific articles have been published and more than 100 conference and workshop presentations have been made.

The ACE Study findings suggest that certain experiences are major risk factors for the leading causes of illness and death as well as poor quality of life in the United States. Progress in preventing and recovering from the nation's worst health and social problems is likely to benefit from understanding that many of these problems arise as a consequence of adverse childhood experiences." <http://www.cdc.gov/ace/index.htm>

CDC is developing, evaluating, and promoting dissemination of programs for the primary prevention of child maltreatment through evidence-based programs that have demonstrated reductions in child maltreatment, such as home visits by nurses to mothers at high risk and parenting programs that teach new skills and behaviors to parents. Home visiting with high risk parents is what Nurturing Families does. Why do we have to go backwards in Connecticut? How does this make sense?

Investing in prevention is the best way to ensure cost effective services. Jeopardizing the integrity of a program that has shown its effectiveness in protecting the most vulnerable members of our society is not the answer.

Thank you for considering our concerns. Please contact me at any time with your questions or comments.

Julia Gonzalez Candela, MS.
Clinical Supervisor, Nurturing Families
UConn Health Center
263 Farmington Ave
Dowling North Suite G2010
Farmington, CT 06030-1323
860-679-8978
jgcandela@uchc.edu