

March 4, 2011

The Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Linda Smith Cohen. I am a clinical social worker with UConn School of Social Work. I want to thank you for this opportunity to tell you about some important research in the field of early intervention and child development. I have long been concerned about the disconnect that occurs between the fields of research and of policymaking. This is an attempt to help bridge that disparity.

This large rigorous scientific study, published in the journal Pediatrics in 2009, was led by Dr. Barry Lester, Ph.D., of Brown University School of Medicine, in collaboration with several other highly respected university research centers throughout the US. "The study shows that the NICU Network Neurobehavioral Scale can identify infants who will later manifest developmental deficits." Specifically the study looked at infants and young children who had experienced several adverse environmental factors such as extreme poverty, prematurity or substance abuse, in order to measure the impact on behaviors in children up to age 4.5 years.

Lester states that, "Early identification and prevention of behavior problems is in line with recent recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics and would address an important public health need. Our findings suggest that it is possible to identify at 1 month infants who are on a path leading to behavior problems in childhood....In the long-term, altering the developmental trajectory of these children could address more severe conduct problems and substance use disorders in adolescence." (Lester et al)

The very good news for Connecticut is that the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) is already doing related work with their nationally recognized evidence-based preventive interventions. NFN identifies new parents who are experiencing high levels of stress at the birth of their first baby. Often the stress is due to those adverse environmental factors mentioned above that are so prevalent in our inner cities. NFN's programs intervene in ways that improve outcomes for these very vulnerable families. And the savings have been felt statewide in education, child welfare, and even criminal justice budgets. Lester's work, identifying vulnerable infants, would allow us to direct limited resources to the infant/parent pairs that are the most fragile. This preventive work is the direction of the future.

Based on this research, it would be irresponsible to cut back on prevention, especially in our cities. During these last two years NFN has already absorbed its share of severe cutbacks and the proposed 25% further cut would be devastating. I believe the citizens of CT care about the long-term future and want to remain in the forefront of advances in science, especially when those advances protect our children.

Thank you,

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References

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Liu Jing, Neonatal Neurobehavior Predicts Medical and Behavioral Outcome. *Pediatrics*, 2010, 125 (1) e90-e98 Downloaded from www.pediatrics.org. Provided by Brown University on Dec 8, 2009.