

***Written Testimony against Proposed 3.2 Million Dollars in Cuts to the Children's Trust Fund***

Dear Chairwomen Senator Toni Harp and Representative Toni Walker; Vice Chairpersons Senator Edith Prague, Representatives Catherine Abercrombie, Henry Genga, and Patricia Miller, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jennifer Vendetti and I coordinate the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) at the UCONN Health Center. NFN is a statewide primary and secondary prevention program of child abuse and neglect and is comprised of three main programs; 1) screening/engagement and postpartum phone support, 2) prenatal and parenting group programs, and 3) intensive home visitation. Within these programs, families around the state are provided with socioemotional support, access to services, information and education on fetal/infant/child development, assessment of infant/child development, family advocacy, and case management. These services are necessary for the health and well-being of caregivers, children, and communities. The Nurturing Families Network is the largest of the programs funded and administered by the Children's Trust Fund. There are currently forty-two sites statewide including all twenty-nine birthing hospitals to provide NFN services.

I understand new cuts to the Children's Trust Fund are proposed in the Governor's recent budget proposal and that these cuts will result in the elimination of our community-based sites in Hartford and New Haven (a total of 13 sites). The proposed elimination of non-hospital sites providing NFN child maltreatment prevention programs will significantly reduce our capacity to serve high need families struggling against severe poverty and violence. NFN programs embedded in community-based centers have added value because families can be identified earlier, services can be accessed in a variety of ways, families are engaged during different points in their family's development, referrals for other needed services are often available within the agency forming comprehensive family service centers.

As a Connections program coordinator, I assess and engage families who deliver their babies at UCONN Health Center and triage them to NFN (and other programs when NFN is not the most appropriate service) programs throughout the state. I am concerned that the elimination of these sites will severely limit our capacity for service delivery for our first-time at risk families, damaging our well-established relationships with antepartum and postpartum medical providers and dismantling important social services networking that have been developed by these sites over the years.

I am also struggling to understand where the cost savings is for Connecticut. These cuts will result increased social service and mental health vulnerability to families which will result in more expensive treatment and intervention and job losses putting social service workers on unemployment. Providing child abuse prevention services as a statewide network maximizes costs and strengthens are ability to serve families.

The Children's Trust Fund and its programs have already taken our share of funding reductions, consolidations, and restructuring over the last two years. We do important work and I know you realize this. Protecting babies and children from neglect and abuse is worth our state's investment.

Thank you for considering these points as you deliberate on the proposed budget.

I welcome your questions and comments.

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