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I appreciate the opportunity to speak at this hearing. I am Lauren Kremer, from the Children's Trust Fund Council. I am here to urge you to preserve funding for programs of the Children's Trust Fund, a division of the Department of Social Services.

As Connecticut families continue struggling to emerge from the Great Recession, policymakers must ensure that state budget changes do not undermine our future prospects.

The governor's mid-term budget proposes a 17% reduction in the \$15 million of state funds aimed at preventing abuse and neglect in families.

This proposal will result in eliminating three programs of the Children's Trust Fund – Family School Connection, Family Empowerment Programs and The Kinship Fund. It will also end funding to the Children's Law Center and cut the state's Healthy Start program by 10%.

The Trust Fund Council is concerned about cuts to child abuse prevention services in our state – something that the state can ill afford.

The Trust Fund has already given up 20% of its budget and lost 50% of its staff over the past three years.

Connecticut's primary prevention goal, as defined by state statute (4-67v) is that, by 2020, at least 10% of total state appropriations for each state agency are allocated for prevention. But our state is far from reaching that goal. According to data released in the November 2011 State of Connecticut Agency Prevention Report, actual state expenditures for prevention are less than 2% of the reported agencies total annual state budget. Cutting prevention programs won't help the state reach its prevention goal.

The programs targeted for elimination - Family School Connection, Family Empowerment Programs and the Kinship Fund - are critically important to our state because they help the Governor achieve the state's goal of improving school readiness and closing our state's achievement gap.

**Family School Connection** helps children who are not getting their needs met – these children are at greater risk for developmental, behavioral and health issues – issues that too often lead to school failure and resulting drop-out. Evaluations from the University of Hartford School of Social Research are compelling. Parents become more involved in their child's education, school and their child's lives. The 200 children in the program make promising gains in attendance and academics.

**Family Empowerment Programs** serve high risk parents including parents with disabilities, parents dealing with substance abuse, incarcerated fathers, and mothers who have experienced domestic violence. Outcomes include better parenting, improved knowledge of child development and an increase use of appropriate parenting techniques. These initiatives increase the odds that children from extremely high risk families are nurtured appropriately and go to school ready to learn.

**The Kinship Fund** provides small grants to orphaned and abandoned children. The grants help to keep children with their families – grandparents or a relative guardian rather than placing these children in foster care. The small grants are often used for children's health care, tutoring, counseling, food or child care – items that have a direct impact on children's ability to learn. Ill nourished, neglected, and unhealthy children are not optimal learners.

We know that childhood success both in school and in life begins with parenting at its best. These Trust Fund programs are interventions that enhance parenting and promote the positive growth and development of young children.