Testimony to Appropriations Subcommittee Re: The Children's Trust Fund

Sen. Harp, Rep Walker and the members of the Appropriations Committee. I am the Director of Adoption and Prevention Services at Family and Children's Agency in Norwalk. Family and Children's Agency is a multi- faceted social service agency that serves over 10,000 children and adults each year.

I am writing today in support of the Children's Trust Fund and the programs that are at risk of losing complete or partial funding which include the Family Empowerment Program, Family School Connection, Children's Law Center, Kinship Fund, and the Healthy Start Program. As you are aware, the Governor in his budget for 2012-2013 has recommended significant reductions and/or elimination of these programs. These crucial initiatives are all vital in the work that is being done to protect the children of Connecticut as all of these programs work with families whose children are at greater risks for child abuse and neglect. The families receiving these services are facing poverty, domestic violence, low education rates, mental health issues, and substance abuse. The workers in these programs help parents address the many issues that interfere with their ability to meet the needs of their children. The families are connected with valuable resources and education that help them to create a safe and loving environment for their children.

For the past eleven years, Family & Children's Agency of Norwalk has worked with the Trust Fund to implement both the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) and Healthy Start Programs. Our Healthy Start Program serves over 300 children and families each year. Not only does our program serve as a contracted site to expedite HUSKY health insurance application but we work with parents to ensure they are connected to any available community resources that will help meet the needs of children. Any cut to this program could have a significant impact on the number of Connecticut children who have health insurance, and thus, access to medical care. In these challenging financial and economic times, families without health insurance will be forced to make difficult choice between paying rent, buying food, or paying for health coverage for their children. Studies demonstrate that children who are neglected, malnourished, and unhealthy are not optimal learners. Now more than ever, it will important to maintain not reduce

the prevention efforts in this state such as the programs of the Children's Trust fund, as they have demonstrated their cost effectiveness to successfully prevent child abuse and neglect.

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