

Good Evening Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Karen Steinberg Gallucci and I am a clinical psychologist at UConn Health Center. I also oversee a Nurturing Families site, and a project focused on providing in-home psychotherapeutic treatment for depressed mothers of young children. I am submitting this testimony to voice my concern over the Governor's proposed cuts to the Children's Trust Fund which will result in the elimination of several very important programs including Family School Connections, Family Empowerment, and the Children's Law Center. The Children's Trust Fund supports and conducts critical work throughout the state of Connecticut focused on prevention, early identification, and early intervention. Their efforts and the value of these efforts to promote child social and emotional development, overall health and well-being, and caregiver-child attachment from the earliest moments of life through adolescence cannot be overstated. We are continually learning about the impact of early exposure to traumatic events such as child abuse and neglect, abandonment, psychological and emotional abuse that create a host of lifelong problems. A recent report highlights the relationship between early traumatic exposure and the cascade of adverse sequelae. The American Academy of Pediatrics released a report in January of this year, The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress, which describes the myriad negative health consequences for individuals exposed to early life stress and trauma. I have previously in these hearings talked about the ACES study from the CDC which similarly tracks the negative trajectories associated with early adversity in terms of physical, social, emotional, academic and career development, mental health, addiction, and legal difficulties, cognitive and brain development. I think it should be considered an unacceptable option to eliminate these types of programs that work so hard to stem this tide. These efforts can in fact prevent or reverse these negative outcomes by building up what we consider protective factors such as supportive parent-child relationships, academic success, self-esteem, community involvement. We must begin to think about our youngest members of society as important capital highly worth investing in. They are our future workforce, creators of legal doctrine, medical practitioners, political leaders. They are our mainstay, our foundation. Without strong and steady support of these most vulnerable citizens, our collective ship risks sinking. This year we have seen the ravages of extreme weather. I would like to make an analogy in likening cutting programs such as those operated by the Children's Trust Fund to cultivating blizzard or hurricane-like conditions in our social fabric. We can't afford to lose our focus at this critical time. We must continue to support important work that produces measurable results both now and for years to come, which the Children's Trust Fund is dedicated to. Thank you for considering my words as you make decisions in the coming weeks.