

**Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, Executive Director  
Madonna Place, Inc.  
240 Main Street  
Norwich, CT 06360**

**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing – February 17, 2012  
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments**

**I am speaking in opposition to the proposal to eliminate funding for the Family Empowerment and Family School Connection Programs, currently funded by the Children's Trust Fund under the Department of Social Services.**

In preparation for the needed midyear budget adjustments, the Department of Social Services submitted a list of recommended adjustments to OPM for consideration, which included the elimination of successful prevention programs overseen by the Children's Trust Fund.

Surely if the Governor or OPM took a look at what was at stake here, these programs would never have remained on the list for elimination. **Would the Governor or you as legislators want to eliminate a Family School Connection Program that helps to close the educational achievement gap?** This program works with high risk elementary children and their families in five Connecticut communities. These are young children that are frequently absent, truant, have academic or behavioral problems, or come to school unprepared. Their parents are often not adequately engaged with their child's school or attending to their child's educational needs. Home visitors work with the families to identify problems, develop plans, improve parenting skills, connect with the school, spend more time with the children, and learn problem solving skills. . Children in the program make promising gains in attendance, behavior and academics, and the parents become more connected to their schools, improve their skills and stabilize their families.

Also slated for elimination in the proposed Midyear adjustment's are the The Family Empowerment Programs, which work around the State to help at risk families and fathers in a variety of community settings and a prison. Utilizing nationally recognized child abuse prevention programs, these programs are focusing on parents and family relationship and the results show better parenting, improved knowledge of child development and increased use or appropriate parenting skills. By investing in prevention efforts, the children of these families are better off, - healthier, free from child abuse, and ready to succeed in school.

I would ask you to consider the wisdom of investing money in new education initiatives while cutting successful programs that are helping children now in school and community settings to succeed in school and to close the achievement gap.

Thank-you.

Nancy W. Gentes, R.N., M.S.  
Executive Director

**I have included some highlights on data on the successful outcomes that the Family School Connection and Family Empowerment Programs :**

**Madonna Place, Inc.-Family Empowerment Program** highlights include (2008 – 2011) include:

- Over 200 young fathers (under 23 years) served over the last six years
- Nearly 80% completion rate among all enrolled
- Majority of graduates increased knowledge of parental skills and increased confidence in using those skills
- Majority of graduates are knowledgeable on ways to sooth a crying baby
- Fathers report enjoying the class and majority report appreciation and satisfaction with services
- Nearly 30 dads used the services to establish paternity and/or custody orders

**Family School Connection** is evaluated by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research. Highlights from past evaluations (2007 – 2010) include:

- Parents who participate in the program develop healthier attitudes about parenting and experience less parental stress
- Parents become more involved in their children's education and in their child's lives
- Parents are more accepting and have more realistic expectations about their children. Data indicates that families have less rigid parenting attitudes and are less likely to treat their children forcefully.