



CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND COUNCIL

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Senator Harp, Representative Abercrombie and distinguished members of the Human Services Subcommittee, I am Laura Amenta, Chair of the Children's Trust Fund Council. On behalf of the Trust Fund Council, I thank you for the opportunity to comments on the on the impact of Governor Malloy's legislative proposal to the Children's Trust Fund.

I want to bring to your attention that the budget proposal calls for elimination of the following programs of the Trust Fund:

- **Family Empowerment Programs**
- **Family School Connection**
- **The Children's Law Center**
- **Kinship and Respite Fund**

The proposal also calls for the merger of the Trust Fund into the newly established Office of Early Childhood (OEC) by July 2014. However, just two programs of the Trust Fund – **Nurturing Families Network and Help Me Grow** - will be merged into this new agency. **Healthy Start** is proposed to be retained in DSS. These three remaining programs are the facing proposed budget cuts. All the other programs are eliminated and several initiatives using federal funds are placed at risk because declining state revenue streams reduce our federal grant allotment.

The Council applauds the establishment of the Office of Early Childhood and supports the move of the Trust Fund to this office. The goal of the Office of Early Childhood is to create a system to help improve the health, social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children. All of the programs of the Trust Fund are evidence- based and support the mission of the Office of Early Childhood.

However, we question the elimination of quality, evidence-based programs designed to strengthen and support families. The Council strongly believes that the complete slate of Trust Fund programs should be moved to the Office of Early Childhood.

While I would like to provide details for all the programs of the Trust Fund, in the interest of time, I will share information on a couple of programs to illustrate how well they fit into the mission of the new agency:

- **Family School Connection** - provides home visitation services to families with elementary school children whose children are at risk of school failure. Evaluations from University of Hartford are compelling. Parents become more involved in their children's education. Children in the program make promising gains in academics, attendance and behavior.
- **Family Empowerment Programs** –include seven nationally recognized programs that assist extremely high risk parents. These include parents of children with disabilities, mothers experiencing domestic violence, and incarcerated fathers. The programs are co-located in settings where families are addressing other issues such as a prison, a domestic violence shelter and a public housing project. These initiatives increase the odds that children from extremely high risk families are nurtured appropriately and go to school ready to learn.
- **Healthy Start** - ensures maternal and child health outcomes through husky enrollment and by connecting pregnant new mothers to health care and other services. The prenatal period is an especially important time for intervention, as many factors that place a child at risk occur during pregnancy. Babies born to mothers who receive no prenatal or inadequate care and babies born to teenage mothers are at increased risk of premature delivery, low birth weight and/or perinatal difficulties. These problems, in addition to other medical stresses at birth, are associated with parent- and teacher-rated behavior problems between the ages of 5 and 7, delinquency at age 18, and later violence.

The quality, evidence-based programs of the Trust Fund and the experience of the Trust Fund in building these programs are valuable assets to a state that is working towards building a system of early childhood programs and applying for federal funds to build the capacity of quality programs. In the opinion of the Council, it makes sense for the Trust Fund to join OEC in the formative stage not a year and a half later.

As the final details of the new early childhood system and its budget are worked out during this legislative session, we hope you will reconsider both the programs of the Trust Fund to be funded and merged into the Office of Early Childhood and the timing of the merger.

Thank you.



Children's Trust Fund

A Division of the State Department of Social Services

The Children's Trust Fund leads the state efforts for community-based, prevention-focused programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families in order to prevent child abuse and neglect. In this role the department is charged with reaching families *before* a crisis occurs - before a child has been abused or neglected.

Programs of the Children's Trust Fund include several major efforts that prevent child abuse and neglect by helping families and communities to be responsive to children, ensuring their healthy growth and development. In addition, the Trust Fund is responsible for the administration of the Community-Based Program to Prevent Child Abuse (CBCAP), a federal program to support innovative community-based prevention efforts. As a part of the CBCAP program the Trust Fund has launched several important initiatives.

Programs of The Children's Trust Fund reached approximately 16,000 families in FY 2011 – 2012. The Trust Fund has a state program services budget of roughly \$13 million. It has seven professional and two clerical staff. Trust Fund programs and its annual reach follow:

The Nurturing Families Network – 5 components *(State and Federally Funded)*

- Intensive home visiting for new parents who are at high risk for child abuse and neglect. The program focuses on nurturing parenting, child development, and health and community resources.
- Nurturing Parenting groups that assist parents in developing appropriate expectations of their children and parenting skills.
- Nurturing Connections is brings new parents together with volunteers and others in the community who can help them adjust to the demands of having a baby.
- New efforts include in-home cognitive behavioral therapy for depressed mothers and enhanced home visiting services for fathers and men in a fathering role.

Services are provided at 42 community locations throughout the state. The Nurturing Families Network served approximately 2,000 families in intensive home visiting and 600 families in Nurturing parenting groups. The program screened 7,200 and provided Connections services to 1,700.

Help Me Grow *(State Funded)*

- Ensures that children and their families have access to a system of early identification, prevention and intervention services. Links child health providers, parents and service providers with existing community resources through a toll-free telephone number (1-800-505-7000).

Help Me Grow connected 2,800 children and families to community based services. It also provided the Ages and Stages Child Monitoring program to 3,000 families.

The Kinship and Respite Fund (*State and Privately Funded*)

- This probate court-administered program awards small grants to aid children living with relatives who are court-appointed guardians. The grants provide for a range of activities including tutoring, camp, extra-curricular experiences and program fees and respite for grandparents.

The Kinship and Respite Funds provided grants to 1266 children and 822 adults.

Family School Connection (*State Funded*)

- Provides intensive home visiting services to families whose children are frequently truant or tardy or otherwise at risk of school failure. Studies have found that the parents of young children who are frequently absent from school often have trouble meeting the needs of their children. Children who are not getting their needs met are at greater risk for child abuse and neglect, developmental, behavioral and health issues – issues that too often lead to school failure.

School Connection provided intensive home visiting services to 170 families.

Family Empowerment Initiatives (*State Funded*)

- Family Empowerment Initiatives include seven nationally recognized prevention programs that assist high-risk groups of parents involved in the lives of children. Family Empowerment Initiatives provided home and group based services to roughly 700 parents.

Legal Services on Behalf of Indigent Children (*State and Privately Funded*)

- The program provides experienced lawyers for indigent children who give them a voice and represent them in family court. The program also provides information in legal matters involving children and advocates who support legislative policies that advance the well being and best interest of children.

The program provided services to 240 adults and 375 children.

Healthy Start (*State and Federal Funded*)

- Ensures maternal and child health outcomes through Husky enrollment and by connecting pregnant and parenting new mothers to health care and other services. Services are provided in 15 locations across the state.

The program enrolled and provides referral services to 5,000 pregnant and new parents.

Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Project – The Stranger You Know (*Federally Funded*)

- Helps parents identify risk and avoid the sexual abuse of their children. The program helps parents understand how molesters think and act and offend against children. It also provides them with information they can use to keep their children safe.

The Stranger You know... has been offered to over 2,500 parents and others since its inception.

Preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome (*Federally Funded*)

- Provides workshops to parents and students across the state. Assists hospitals and other to embed a program within their organization. Trains community providers to offer the program to the families they serve.

1,500 parents and students participated in programs to prevent shaken baby syndrome through their schools, hospitals, prisons and community groups.

Family Development Training and Credentialing program (*Federally Funded*)

- Training human services staff to better engage and support families in prevention efforts. Course are offered for front-line and management staff. Six college course credits are available for staff that successfully completes the course for frontline staff.

50 students received credentials through the FDC program.

Triple P – Positive Parenting Program (*Federally and Privately Funded*)

- A parenting program providing multi-level intervention. At the lowest level, the program provides advice for parents dealing with common childhood problems. At the final level, an enhanced Triple P, provides skills and support to deal with parental depression, marital discord, or other family stresses. Triple P is the first parenting program to demonstrate longitudinal, population-level effects for parents and children. The focus of this program is on the general population and not just individual or at-risk families.

In 2013, *Triple P* initiative is being rolled out to Hartford and Eastern CT.