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

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Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

"It is much easier to become a father than to be one."
~ Kent Nerburn, Letters to My Son: Reflections on Becoming a Man, 1994

My testimony is in opposition to the proposal to eliminate funding for the John Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Programs, funded by the Department of Social Services since 1999.

I represent Madonna Place, one of six State certified sites that currently provides comprehensive services to fathers and other men who are significant in the lives of young children. *The purpose of our Fatherhood Program is to increase a father's ability to meet the financial, emotional, medical and educational needs of their children, and to promote positive interactions of fathers and their children by supporting fathers. The ultimate goal is to improve the lives of children and families in our community.* Our program is open to all fathers and father figures (custodial and noncustodial) interested in enhancing their ability to meet the needs of their children or the children in their lives. A special focus is placed on serving low-moderate income fathers who have barriers which prevent them from being fully involved and responsible fathers. These barriers include unemployment or underemployment, history of substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness, a poor relationship with the mother of their child (children), involvement with the Department of Children and Families, lack of housing, lack of reliable transportation, and lack of basic needs resources. Additionally we have resources (currently funded through the CTF -Family Empowerment and at also at risk, for elimination) which allow us to focus on prevention efforts, i.e. – first time fathers, single fathers, fathers who are "at-risk, expectant fathers, have infants, etc. This focus is especially aligned with our agency's philosophy of directing resources towards prevention and early intervention, and is viewed as a more effective way to assist fathers, rather than waiting until they are "broken" and significant damage may have occurred to their relationship with their children.

Madonna Place is also a member of the Fatherhood Coalition – representing the original 6 State certified fatherhood agencies that all received DSS state funding and are now at risk to have this funding eliminated without your intervention. **We respectively request funding be restored – 500,000 for the six certified sites – this equates to 83,333/site, which is approximately level funding (74,166/site currently) The other sites are Career Resources – Bridgeport, Families in Crisis – Hartford (prison based), New Opportunities – Waterbury, Family Strides – Torrington, and New Haven Family Alliance, New Haven**

Each of the six certified sites is currently operating on very limited funding due to the cessation of federal funding in September of 2011. At Madonna Place, we support our program consisting of two case managers with the current State funding, some United Way money and funding we raise from the local foundations and other fundraising efforts.

Our programs help children to be better off financially, emotionally and educationally. One of the best ways to attack many of the problems facing children and families today is to encourage the positive involvement of fathers. Fathers who participate in our programs are becoming and staying employed, paying child support, and increasing their parenting skills and the amount of positive time they spend with their children.

Connecticut has been a leader in the country for Fatherhood work thanks to the leadership started by John Martinez and Patricia Wilson Coker and supported by this legislature. I appreciate your continued support and consideration of this request.

More information about the program:

Working With Fathers:

Madonna Place follows evidence based practices in its approaches to engaging fathers and providing services. A crucial strategy for our recruitment of fathers is the development of partnerships with the community. Successful relationships with other places where fathers may go are essential to finding fathers who may need help. In addition to helping to recruit fathers, partnerships have been built to develop comprehensive services and resources for fathers and families which have enhanced our program services.

Staff selection is an important part of fatherhood engagement. Our staff are knowledgeable, culturally aware, sensitive to fatherhood concerns and primarily male. We attempt to hire staff that mirror our

fathers in culture, gender, and to some extent, age. We also insure that all agency staff is trained and aware of fatherhood services and how to approach fathers, and have made sure that the agency is "father friendly" and a welcoming place for men to come to.

The location of our services is important to reach fathers. Our program is located in downtown Norwich, on the bus line, near many other services, including the Court. We also have a satellite office in New London and do home and community visits, as well as groups in other agencies. The agency and fatherhood program offer flexible hours for services including evenings, and weekends if necessary.

Engaging teen fathers requires special skills and program adaptations. We realize that young fathers have unique needs and this translates into having groups that are just for them. It is both our experience and grounded in theory on adolescent development that young dads need an opportunity to remain themselves as they develop into responsible fathers.

An important aspect of engagement of fathers is providing "hands on" opportunities to practice parenting skills and positive guidance strategies they are learning in the program. Throughout the course of "24/7 Dad" and "Dr. Dad" the fathers have ample opportunities to practice parenting skills and positive guidance strategies through role play and other experiential activities. In the "Dr. Dad" course the dads use dolls to practice swaddling, diaper changing, safe ways to carry a child, and effective soothing techniques. Having an agency that is a family support center, with a kitchen, play rooms and set up to be family friendly makes it much easier for all fathers, families to engage in our services.

Listening to fathers concerns is as important as providing them with information and curriculum. Many fathers in a group or individual setting benefit from the opportunity to share his life story. For a father to talk about who he is, where he came from, and where he is now, helps him to realize that his life has meaning and that he has something to teach and offer to his children. These therapeutic kind of exercises can be weaved into a parenting program, and also done as part of a parent-child activity. "Dad and Me" activities are a fun way to encourage interaction between children and their fathers. Madonna Place includes this as part of our parenting program. Our program has also been asked to sponsor these events by the "Children's First" Initiatives in two towns, and we have offered these very successful evenings at community settings to school aged children and their fathers/male figures.

Our services to fathers are individualized, flexible, strength-based and 1-1 services are always available. We have found that many fathers need more than what a group-based curriculum approach can provide. We also give fathers plenty of opportunity for input and feedback both formally and informally and use their feedback to provide needed changes. Staff receive individual supervision, from the Program Manager and group supervision from an external consultant who is an experienced clinician which provides an outlet for the staff to receive feedback, vent and get concrete help from their peers and supervisor.

In understanding how to work with fathers, Madonna Place fatherhood program knows it is crucial to understand that men need concrete information, and will respond best to this type of

approach. We let Dads know how important and unique their role and involvement is in the development and outcome of their child. Mothers are the gatekeepers to fathers, and often to children. Mothers often want the best for their children, but may need to work through their own perceptions of the role of fathers before accepting new information. When needed and accepted, we work with mothers to help facilitate this process.

The Fatherhood Initiative at Madonna Place works to provide fathers with the means to maintain healthy relationships with their children and by doing so, through case management, groups, and other activities within the agency. When fathers enter the program, case managers help them realize that their engagement in the program is strictly self motivated as opposed to mandated by someone else. This process of not accepting perceived mandated clients allows us to focus our energies on fathers that are committed to involvement with their children and therefore, they maintain contact with the program. The most useful tactics we use is to encourage fathers to stay involved with our program is teaching them about the importance and implications of their positive involvement with their child. When dad realizes that his role has an impact on others and on himself he may have a greater tendency to remain involved in our program and even more important remain involved with his children. This concept of empowerment is done at all points of their program involvement.

Services Provided:

- Beginning with the initial intake process and through a continued intensive case management approach the father and case manager identify his strengths, his challenges/barriers and his need for services. As trust is developed a family development plan is created in complete partnership with the father.
- Comprehensive case management includes assessment, family development planning, follow-up, coordination of services, referrals, and advocacy. The comprehensive nature of case management and a generalized program design allows staff and fathers to look at the "whole picture" of fatherhood responsibilities, financial, emotional, educational, medical and social.
- Informal counseling consists of providing guidance, feedback, supportive listening, and giving non bias suggestions. Counseling is not "therapy" yet provides emotional support needed to help fathers stay focused, to work through their frustrations, and setbacks, as they attempt to improve and learn about their relationship with their children and make progress towards taking more responsibility for them.
- Informal mediation is conducted to assist in working out cooperative agreements between parents. This service assists by attempting to break down barriers to child access and successful parenting caused by communication failures and conflicts between parents
- Legal advocacy includes providing help with filling out forms, explaining procedures, coordination with attorneys, family relations and child support officials, referrals to legal resources, court appearances, and letters of support on program participation. This service helps fathers to become more informed about legal matters. It increases their chances of achieving success through this system and can lead to improved financial support of children and increased access to children.

- Voluntary Paternity Establishment (VPE) can be done with fathers and mothers who have not yet completed the VPE process. This service benefits children and families and helps fathers to legally establish their relationship with their children- a big step towards taking full responsibility for their children
- Dissemination of information on a variety of subjects pertinent to fathers such as child development, parenting, relationships, legal rights and responsibilities, child support, housing, employment. Information helps fathers to improve their parenting knowledge. Other information can be used to improve a father's ability to advocate for himself and to improve his economic and basic need status.
- Transportation assistance includes information/referral on car loan/car repair programs, bus passes, some direct transporting by staff. This direct assistance helps fathers who have transportation issues preventing them from seeking or keeping employment, engaging in other services, participating in our program, or seeing his children.
- Parenting classes include a twelve week parenting curriculum titled "24/7 Dad A.M." with a Money Smart (financial literacy) component weaved into the 13 weeks. A another groups service is facilitating "24/7 Dad" both A.M. and P.M. in collaboration with Southeastern Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (SCADD) for fathers committed to substance abuse recovery from New London County.
- Dr. Dad is offered four times a year at the Backus Hospital Birthing center. The Doctor Dad program is an infant/toddler health and safety workshop which is specifically designed for fathers with young children. As increasing numbers of dads are taking care of the daily needs of their infants and toddlers, Doctor Dad enables men to handle the majority of medical and safety situations that may arise as their children grow. Fathers learn how to use basic medical knowledge to provide compassionate care, enabling them to handle the majority of medical and safety situations that may arise as their children grow.
- For teen/ young fathers we have a group for young fathers that uses both 24/7 Dad and Dr. Dad. Childcare and food are provided during all group activities. – All group activities give fathers the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills and techniques which can help them improve their ability to parent and better meet their child's needs. Support groups provide ongoing reinforcement of advocacy, parenting and other skills, opportunity to learn new information, and to form peer support networks and provide mentoring opportunities.

Research on the harmful effects of fatherhood absence to children and the cost of society are well known and discouraging. On the positive side, there are many reasons to support and encourage positive fatherhood involvement beginning in pregnancy.

When fathers are involved during the pregnancy, babies have fewer complications at birth. *Source: Alio, A.P., Mbah, A.K., Kornosky, J.L., Marty, P.J. & Salihu, H.M. "The Impact of Paternal Involvement on Feto-Infant Morbidity among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics". Maternal Child Health J. 2010; 14(5): 735-41.*

Expectant fathers can play a powerful role as advocates of breastfeeding to their partners. Three-fourths of women whose partners attended a breastfeeding promotion class initiated breastfeeding.
Source: Wolf berg, Adam J., et al. "Dads as breastfeeding advocates: results from a randomized controlled trial of an educational intervention." American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology 191 (September 2004): 708-712.

A study of low-income minority adolescents aged 10-14 years found that higher social encounters and frequent communication with nonresident biological fathers decreased adolescent delinquency.
Source: Coley, R. L., & Medeiros, B. L. (2007). Reciprocal longitudinal relations between nonresident father involvement and adolescent delinquency. Child Development, 78, 132–147

Adolescent girls who reported higher levels of relationship quality with their fathers were less likely to have sex before age 16, compared with adolescent girls who reported lower levels of father-daughter relationship quality.
Source: Ikramullah, E., Manlove, J., Cui, C., & Moore, K. A. (2009). Parents matter: The role of parents in teens' decisions about sex. Washington, D.C.: Child Trends.

Youth are more at risk of first substance use without a highly involved father. Each unit increase in father involvement is associated with 1% reduction in substance use.
Source: Bronte-Tinkew, Jacinta, Kristin A. Moore, Randolph C. Capps, and Jonathan Zaff. "The influence of father involvement on youth risk behaviors among adolescents: A comparison of native-born and immigrant families." Article in Press. Social Science Research December 2004

Thank-you again for your interest, and please feel free to contact me for any additional information or for questions.

ngentes@madonnaplace.org