



**CITY OF NEW HAVEN**  
**COMMUNITY SERVICE ADMINISTRATION**  
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**MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH DIVISION**  
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**TESTIMONY OF Maria Damiani, MCH Director**  
**New Haven Health Department**  
**Human Services Hearings**  
**February 26, 2013**

**H.B. No. 6367 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS. (HS)**

My name is Maria Damiani. I direct Maternal and Child Health programs for the City of New Haven's Department of Health. The New Haven Health Department is one of 5 statewide Healthy Start Contractors with the Department of Social Services whose mission is to link families at risk for poor birth outcomes into early prenatal care and to other essential services. I am here today in response to the proposed 34% budget reduction to the Healthy Start line item and to offer you a concrete understanding of what Healthy Start is accomplishing and why these services should be sustained and strengthened.

Healthy Start is a statewide system that addresses the cultural and bilingual needs of high-risk pregnant women and children and is a critical component of New Haven's system of Maternal and Child care. In FY 11/12 the MCH Division served 1059 pregnant and postpartum women and 651 children. Eight hundred and sixty six women were screened for depression and those who were identified were appropriately referred and followed. Healthy Start's strength is assessing the individual needs of the family and connecting that family to existing community based resources, such as, Birth to Three, Early Head Start, Head Start, Nurturing Families, Family Resource Centers, School Readiness programs, teen clinics, WIC, parenting programs and shelters.

In order to promote positive birth outcomes, Healthy Start contractors provide HUSKY application assistance and case management/home visiting support services for some of Connecticut's poorest and most vulnerable families. In addition to our collaborative relationship with the regional DSS offices and assisting with the HUSKY application process, the Healthy Start network is an integral and essential component of New Haven's care coordination/home visiting service delivery system for families at-risk of poor birth and health outcomes, child poverty and undiagnosed developmental delays.

*"YOUR HEALTH IS OUR COMMUNITY'S WEALTH"*

The State of Connecticut has always been on the forefront of health care coverage for low-income families and has supported these efforts at the community level for years. We urge you to understand the full impact the loss of the Healthy Start program will have directly on families. Please do not confuse these efforts as just another "duplicative HUSKY outreach initiative", it is much more than that. Healthy Start is a comprehensive system of care with the over-arching goals of 1) improving access to health care, particularly among our minority populations; 2) eliminating disparities and 3) improving birth outcomes.

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 reducing funding for Healthy Start Programs and consider moving Healthy Start along with other home visitation programs into the Office of Early Childhood.

I urge the Appropriations Committee to restore full funding to the Healthy Start line item and to fund the Healthy Start network as a compliment to the Office of Early Childhood. 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. Healthy Start fits into this continuum, is evidence- based and supports the Early Childhood mission.

Thank you,

Maria Damiani