CAREER RESOURCES
Preparing Workers for Life

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee/Human Services Subcommittee on H.B. 5030, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 20`15

Re: Department of Social Services, John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Funding

Submitted by...Scott K. Wilderman, President/CEO, Career Resources Inc.
wilderman@careerresources.org, (203) 953-3259

Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the committee. My name is Scott K. Wilderman and I am President/CEO of Career Resources Inc. CRI is headquartered in Bridgeport and is a nonprofit focused on training and support to low-income and disadvantaged jobseekers. Realizing long ago that our customers very often need to address basic needs before they can succeed in the workforce, CRI offers critical services to do just that – including STRIVE attitudinal job readiness training, adult education, vocational training-- and the program I want to tell you about today: Fathers for Life.

CRI was one of the state's first programs to embrace the certification process established by the Department of Social Services' John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative to ensure the quality of services. Essentially we offer case management, connection to employment and all the resources of the American Jobs Center, and a 13-week certified parenting curriculum called the 24/7 Dads curriculum. It's open-entry, so parents can enter any time, and the class is offered in a group setting. That means parents are learning from each other and their experiences, even while they learn and practice needed skills such as anger management, communication skills, how to maintain or to re-establish connection with kids -- or with communicate a custodial parent.

We want to thank DSS for its allocation and investment in the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative, over the years, and to ***urge you to restore $195,000 to maintain current services.*** *Our programs have built a capacity and momentum. This funding is critical to continue services and to reach more parents and improve outcomes for them and their families.*

Fathers for Life had been in operation for a few years before it was named by our participants. The name is indicative of their experience; there is nothing quite so powerful as your children to motivate you to begin and persevere at the difficult task of establishing yourself as an adult and supporting your family.

Over the years CRI and other fatherhood programs have established excellent relationships with many community partners, including the Family Magistrate Courts. An employment pilot conducted in 2013 in Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven offered insight into how powerful and effective these services are. These pilots were offered in conjunction with CSSD, the Family Support Magistrate division, and DSS-certified fatherhood sites, and it found significant increases in the amount of support paid, amount of average payment, and the frequency of payments made. CRI and our certified Fatherhood partners are also currently working with Bennett Pudlin and with DSS to develop a meaningful and rigorous RBA framework with which to better measure the impact and outcomes we have for children and communities. We are truly excited to be able to better tell our story.

As you may know many of our dads have been incarcerated and are trying to reestablish a connection with their kids – or, also very common, they never knew their own father and are trying to forge a new path where they have no role models. That is one reason the group dynamic, and being able to talk to and learn from other parents, is so important.

I wish I could take you into the classroom for our Tuesday night groups or into the offices to hear about how these groups and how services impact people's lives. You would see parents are in closer touch with their children....have more positive relationships with their kids and with the children's custodial parents....take part in their children's school... and quite simply are a positive presence in their kids' lives. In closing I will leave you with some thoughts from the dads in our 24/7 Dads class this past Tuesday night:

> "I am currently involved in a custody case with the mother of my daughter. FFL helps me deal with the frustration as far as the case is concerned. Along with the support from fellow fathers, the 24/7 dads workshop has helped me develop patience, a sense of self-worth, helped me have a better understanding of certain situations that may arise when communicating with the mother if my daughter, and has made me want become a better father to my daughter." ~Marcus

> "I have spent a lot of my life incarcerated, and never really been a part of my children's lives. The 24/7 Dads Workshop gives me insight on my role as a father. It has educated me on communicating with my children, setting boundaries for my children, setting aside time for my children, supporting my children, not just financially, but mentally, emotionally, spiritually." ~Courtney

> "I am in the processor getting custody of my children. I know that I am not the perfect dad, and I have a lot to learn about being a dad. FFL is helping me to become a better dad. From the 24/7 dad workshop, to the interaction I have with other dads in the program. It is a great support system for us. I realize that I am not the only dad out here striving to become a better dad, and to be more

involved in the lives of my children." ~Cyril

"I'm currently seeking more visitation with my daughter, as well as joint custody. I want to be ready to be a 100% father to my little girl. FFL is helping me to become that 100% Dad!!" ~Daryl

"I am seeking custody of my children, but I know there is a lot I have to learn in order to be a better father. FFL is helping to become a better Dad." ~Javier

"I have been incarcerated for seven years, so I missed a lot as far as my girls are concerned. I am trying to make up for lost time, but I know that I will need some guidance. FFL is where I will begin. I am currently attending the 24/7 dads workshop, which has offered so much information on being a better father to my children. Not only that, the staff is always willing to help in any way that they can. From counseling, to helping me find employment." ~William

Thank you for your time attention and I invite you to visit CRI in Bridgeport or any other certified Fatherhood site to talk to our parents and observe our programs!

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