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**Testimony to Urge Restoration of Proposed Budget Cuts
To Department of Social Services Teen Pregnancy Prevention**

February 27, 2015

Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Shannon Ryan and I am an intern at the Family Centered Services of Connecticut for the Teen Outreach Program (TOP®). I have been interning at this program since August 2014 and have been with students from West Haven High School since then. We currently serve 51 students at WHHS and have a sincere and deep connection with these students. We offer discussions on topics that are relevant to them and provide them with information about the world that will help them become well-rounded adults.

We employ the DSS-funded Wyman Teen Outreach Program (TOP), an evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention model designed to teach students healthy behaviors and problem solving skills while giving them a sense of purpose so they can set life goals and contribute to the community. National studies have shown that TOP lowers the risk of school dropout by 60% and pregnancy by 53%. The average cost of DSS-funded teen pregnancy prevention services per student is only \$2430. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the

progress CT has made in reducing teen childbearing saved taxpayers an estimated \$230 million in 2010 alone.

I have also visited other schools that are within the program and have seen the real life connections that students make with TOP® facilitators. We facilitators are a guiding light for some of these students to realize their full potential and offer them the support they may not be getting from anywhere else. Just one look at any one of our classrooms and you would see the connection that the students have with our facilitators is invaluable and life-changing for these young and impressionable age groups. We are not teachers, and in that respect, students are able to form better relationships with us and confide their academic and personal problems to us.

Our students have grown so much since the beginning of the school year, opening up and blossoming into the adults we hope them to be and becoming a real part of their community by engaging in community service learning opportunities, teaching them life skills and most importantly that they are a part of a community: your community.

To cut the funding for this program would be a grave mistake. You would be taking away a valuable support for future TOP® students as well as sending the message that it is not worth the time of the state to ensure that young teens are getting the necessary attention and commitment that they deserve.

Shannon Ryan

TOP® Intern

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