

**Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, Executive Director
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**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – March 3, 2015
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget**

My testimony is in opposition to the proposal to eliminate funding for the Family Empowerment Funding, currently funded by the Office of Early Childhood.

History and use of Funds: The funding for this program is used for parent education, prevention, group education services for fathers in our Fatherhood Initiative Program. The funding amount proposed for elimination for our program is \$42,642. This funding has been in place since 1997 and was initially given to Madonna Place prior to the 1999 Fatherhood legislation and allowed us to hire our first dedicated case manager for fathers.

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), lack of housing, lack of reliable transportation, and lack of basic needs resources. Additionally because we have resources from the Family Empowerment fund, we can 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. It is a safety net for fathers who are not eligible for or interested in home visiting programs, and for those younger fathers who need more intensive case management that those programs can provide.

I appreciate your continued support and consideration of this request to restore State Funding to Fatherhood through the Family Empowerment Program.