

**Written Testimony of Scott W. Swartz, Associate Program Manager
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**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – February 27, 2015
Public Hearing on the Governor’s Proposed Budget**

My testimony is in opposition to the proposal to eliminate funding of the three sources for fatherhood programming.

- 1. The John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Programs, funded by the Department of Social Services since 1999.**
- 2. The Department of Children and Families “Lower Priority Contracted Services” Fatherhood Initiative.**
- 3. The Office of Early Childhood, Children’s Trust Fund line item.**

My title is Associate Program Manager of the Fatherhood Program at Madonna Place, Inc. a family support agency in Norwich. I represent Madonna Place and the families we serve which now include New London, Windham and Middlesex counties. The desired result of our services is that children in these counties will develop in safe and nurturing families.

That’s the point - ultimately it’s about the kids. We work with dads and male figures to help them meet their children’s needs and become a positive, responsible role model. The fathers who come to us have challenges that can cover the gamut from mental illness or a history of substance abuse to just needing some guidance with child development and appropriate discipline. They could be struggling with unemployment; meeting basic needs, or have relationship difficulties with the mother of their children and many have lost hope. Despite the barriers to being the father they want to be, these men want to tackle these struggles and challenges for the sake of their children.

The common denominator is that each of these men and there have been over 1,500 dads in the past 7 years; are struggling with something in their life and lack the tools to get back on track. The Fatherhood Initiative Programs give them that hope and help them address whatever challenges are in the way of them being positively and responsibly engaged with their kids.

The contracted services with The Department of Children and Families has enabled us to expand into Windham and Middlesex counties to work specifically with DCF involved fathers. There is no other fatherhood programming in these areas and nowhere else for the social workers to refer these dads to. This is a new and unique service for these vulnerable families. Should the funding be cut for the DCF contracted Fatherhood services, these fathers will have no program to turn to in the future.

The funding from the Office of Early Childhood, Children's Trust Fund assists us with providing case management to our fathers. This allows us to meet individually with dads and reinforce information presented during our groups. Case management also includes assisting a dad with navigating the family court system, providing job leads, creating individual parenting plans, etc.

The men that succeed within the Fatherhood Initiative Programs understand that by them being successful, the odds of their children succeeding increase. Those 1,500 dads that I mentioned earlier - they have over 2,500 children. That is 2,500 kids that our **one** Fatherhood Initiative Program has had a positive impact on. 2,500 future adults that are more likely to become productive members of Connecticut.

The various funding sources for the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Programs give dads the courage to raise their children and build stronger families.

I'm asking you to have the courage to keep it going.

I am also writing in support of the Family School Connection Program within the Department of Education.

