



**Written Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, Executive Director  
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**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing – February 11, 2016  
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget**

My testimony is in opposition to the complete elimination of funding for State of Connecticut, Fatherhood Initiative Programming from the DSS budget.

**Despite the fact that fatherlessness is the number 1 factor contributing to child poverty, each year the Governor's Budget proposes elimination of funding to support fatherhood initiative programming?**

Background: Why has the State invested in Fatherhood Programs? *The ultimate goal is to improve the lives of children and families in our community.* Family structures have changed over time, with less families living in traditional, nuclear families, regardless of income. The number of low-income non-residential (custodial) fathers has increased, particularly among minority groups. The role of fathers as more than financial providers has been given significant recognition. Research has clearly demonstrated that children do better when fathers are positively involved in their lives; and conversely that their absence can lead to negative consequences. Fatherhood Programs are effective in connecting fathers to their children, preferably early in life and in breaking down barriers which prevent them from being fully involved and responsible fathers. These barriers that fathers present with include a history of incarceration, unemployment or underemployment, history of substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness, a poor relationship with the mother of their child (children), involvement with the Department of Children and Families, lack of housing, lack of reliable transportation, and a lack of basic needs resources.

**Madonna Place** has been part of the State Fatherhood Initiative since the inception of the legislation in 1999 and is one of six funded State certified sites that currently provides comprehensive services to fathers and other men who are significant in the lives of young children.

**Impact:** Fathers who participate in our programs are becoming and staying employed, paying child support, learning parenting skills and increasing the amount of positive time they spend with their children. They are becoming fully responsible fathers. Children and families are better off.

**Specific funding:**

The DSS funding is for intensive case management and group parenting services of low-income fathers and father figures. 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), involvement with the Department of Children and Families, lack of housing, lack of reliable transportation, and lack of basic needs resources.

Connecticut has been a leader in the country for Fatherhood work thanks to the leadership started by John Martinez and Patricia Wilson Coker and supported by this legislature. I appreciate your continued support and consideration of this request to restore State Funding to Fatherhood.