

Written Testimony of Will Marquez, Bilingual Case Manager & Group Facilitator
The Fatherhood Program
Madonna Place, Inc.
240 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360

This letter 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.

Hello my name is Will Marquez, Bilingual Case Manager & Group Facilitator of the Fatherhood Initiative at Madonna Place, a family support agency in Norwich. I represent Madonna Place and the families we serve which include New London & Windham counties. The desired result of our services is that children in New London County will develop in safe and nurturing families.

I'm asking you to continue the funding for the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative. The six state certified fatherhood sites need to continue providing the services for fathers that have made Connecticut a national leader in encouraging father involvement. Many of the fathers we work with are the ones who have been convicted of all crimes and backgrounds. They have had so much conflict with their children's mothers that they haven't been present for their kids' needs. Many of them have been irresponsible and absent. They come to us often weighed down by their guilt and the stigma of their records. Besides these fathers, we also work with dads of all types. Single fathers, fathers who only get to see their kids every other week, military dads who want to be there for their kids but have been transferred away from their families. **I'm not writing to ask you to help these dads. I'm asking you to help their children.** 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.

Kids without fathers are more likely to be placed in foster care, to be placed on state assistance, to drop out of school, to have kids before they reach 20, to go to jail, to have their own children removed from their care, and I could keep going. But I don't think I need to. I think you all know that kids do better with both parents involved in their lives. The question is how to do it. Every day we work on the solution. Every day we help fathers re-engage with their kids. . Their challenges can cover a wide range area 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.

We take referrals every week from DCF, from DSS, Child Support Enforcement, the DOC and the Judicial Branch. The judges, probation officers and social workers don't have anywhere else to send these fathers for guidance and support besides our fatherhood programs.

The same economic stressors that have put pressure on the State of Connecticut applies to our state's families as well. Many of the benefits of funding the Fatherhood Program will not be seen for years, but not all of them. We know that more men are paying their child support today because of our work. We know that more dads are seeing their kids every week because of our work. We know that men who are more involved in their kids' lives tend to progress in their own lives due to a growing relationship with their children. We know that we have helped men make those better decisions that have saved the State of Connecticut the cost of judicial and incarceration.

The common denominator is that each of these men and there have been nearly 700 in the past 4 years; are struggling with something in their life and lack the tools to get back on track. The John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Programs give them that hope and help them address whatever challenges are in the way of them being positively engaged with their kids. The men that succeed within the Fatherhood Programs understand that by them being successful, the odds of their children succeeding increase. Here are a few facts collected from recent studies that show the benefits from having a father who is involved with their children:

- **To work harder & do well to get A's, enjoy school**
- **Participate in extracurricular activities**
- **Have healthy self-esteem**
- **Exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior**

Avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy and criminal activity. Those nearly 700 dads that I mentioned earlier - they have over 1,300 children. That is 1,300 kids that our **one** Fatherhood Initiative Program has had a positive impact on. 1,300 future adults that are more likely to become productive members of Connecticut.

Even President Obama understands the importance of fathers on our society. To quote from his State of the Union Address - "And we'll work to strengthen families by removing the financial deterrents to marriage for low-income couples, and do more **to encourage fatherhood** – because what makes you a man isn't the ability to conceive a child; it's having the courage to raise one. And we want to encourage that." "Stronger families. Stronger communities. A stronger America."

Let's keep Connecticut strong. Let's keep Connecticut's families strong.

Reinstating the funding would give each site and dads hope once again. The state is not our only funder, but it is our most important. Please reinstate funding for the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative for the **KIDS**.

Thank You

Will Marquez
Madonna Place
Fatherhood Program, Bilingual Case Manager
& Group Facilitator

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