

Testimony of Wendy Yagarich, Director of Programs
Madonna Place, Inc.
240 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360

Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – February 11, 2016
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished Committee Members;

My name is Wendy Yagarich and I am the Director of Programs at Madonna Place in Norwich. Our agency is a nonprofit that serves over 3000 parents and children each year from New London County.

My testimony is in opposition to the proposed Elimination of the Fatherhood Initiative programs.

Our Fatherhood program is funded from three State sources as are most across the state. The funds are from the Department of Social Services under Fatherhood Initiative, the Department of Children and Families under Low Priority Contracts, and from the Children's Trust Fund's Family Empowerment Program in the Office of Early Childhood.

For over 15 years, our State leads the nation in designing, developing and certifying fatherhood services. The legacy of State Representative, John S. Martinez who passed away in 2002 has been strong. John pioneered the Fatherhood Initiative of Connecticut legislation in 1999. He knew the importance of a father's interaction with his child and fought to develop public policies that benefit fathers and their families.

This program works in a prevention manner to teach fathers how to care for and nurture their children. The Fatherhood programs that are slated for elimination are crucial components of an integrated early childhood system. Spending on human capital, especially early childhood, is one of the most effective investments a government can make.

The Fatherhood Initiative program has a proven record of effectively engaging fathers in supportive services. The program not only helps them learn parenting skills, it conducts case management to help fathers establish paternity, custody orders, co-parenting plans, and financial support agreements. CT has wisely invested in Fatherhood Initiative programs and the bottom line cost is not expensive.

Eliminating the only State Certified Fatherhood service in Connecticut would directly impact the most underserved and vulnerable populations and their children.

Madonna Place's Fatherhood Initiative has served over 850 fathers and over 1,600 children. The program has nearly 80% completion rate among all enrolled. The majority of graduates increased knowledge of parental skills and increased confidence in using those skills, report enjoying the class and report appreciation and satisfaction with services.

Please do not eliminate the three funding sources for Fatherhood. Parents and children in CT are counting on you!

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 860-886-6600 ext.123 or by email at wyagarich@madonnaplace.org.

Thank you for your time.