

Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, Executive Director  
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Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

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My testimony is in opposition to the proposal to the creation of a combined block grant agency operation accounts fund throughout the proposed midterm budget. This type of budgeting creates a lack of transparency and accountability to the legislature and the public. It leaves it up to the State Department/Executive Branch to decide what their priorities are and without any systems in place to make these decisions, despite a new mandate to do so based on program results and performance. To make matters worse, there is a call for a 5.75% reduction in these agency accounts.

**Specifically, with regard to this testimony, we are concerned with how these budget structural changes and reductions will impact programs for families and young children funded by the Office of Early Childhood, Division of Family Support Services, known formerly as the Children's Trust Fund.**

**The Family School Connection Program,**

This program works with high risk elementary children and their families in three Connecticut communities. These are young children that are frequently absent, truant, have academic or behavioral problems, or come to school unprepared. Family School Connection addresses absenteeism, one of the key indicators selected by the legislators' own Children's Committee Report card. Their parents are often not adequately engaged with their child's school or attending to their child's educational needs. Most often there are problems at home getting in the way of the child's progress at school, and the school needs a way to reach out to the family in a non-threatening way. DCF is not the answer - Family School Connection is. It is not rocket science to understand the connection between attending school and positive school achievement. Attendance improves when children and families are engaged, and children are then able to learn.

**Family Empowerment Program:** The funding for this program is used for parent education, prevention, group education services for fathers in our Fatherhood Initiative Program. 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. Investing in fatherhood programs that work is an investment in reducing childhood poverty and insuring the best outcomes for children.

**Nurturing Families Program:** The Nurturing Families Network consists of the Nurturing Connections program, which provides telephone support and referral services for first-

time mothers; the Intensive Home Visiting Program, which includes weekly home visitation and case management services; and/or Nurturing Parenting Program groups, community-based parenting education and support groups for families. While most programs have been designed to intervene after a crisis has occurred, the Nurturing Families Network (NFN) works toward preventing problems by identifying and supporting at-risk families. NFN program staff work with prenatal clinics, OB/GYN practices and birthing hospitals across Connecticut to screen first-time parents and refer them to the appropriate NFN program. Research evaluating NFN shows the programs have helped parents reduce stress, use community resources more effectively, further their education and careers and develop healthier relationships with their children.

These are all successful, prevention programs that have research or data to demonstrate results. We encourage you to insure that these programs and all the effective programs of the Family Support Services Division (Children's Trust Fund) continue to be funded without further cuts by restoring the budget to a line item format and eliminating the agency operations budget structure.

Thank you for your consideration.