

Anna Figueroa, Clinical Supervisor
Nurturing Families Network
Madonna Place, Inc.
240 Main Street
Norwich, CT 06360

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Public Hearing – February 16, 2016
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

Good evening,

My name is Anna Figueroa and I am the Clinical Supervisor of the Nurturing Families Network programs at Madonna Place in Norwich.

As a State Funded Nurturing Families Network (NFN) program, our program provides in home services to at risk first time mothers and fathers. The mission of our program, like all NFN programs, is to prevent child maltreatment and improve child well-being by working in partnership with high risk first time parents facing the challenges of parenthood by enhancing their strengths, providing education and creating community connections. The vision of our NFN program is that every child will be raised within a supportive and nurturing environment.

Our program, located in Norwich, reaches the hardest to reach families who are often isolated, transient and experiencing a multitude of stressors. For these families, parenting in a manner that results in a supportive and nurturing environment for their children is an everyday, morning to night, challenge.

Our NFN program IS making a difference in the lives of children and families. On a daily basis our program is:

- Providing families with information and education regarding their children's development, parenting support and strategies for ensuring safe and enriching environments
- Screening mothers, fathers and their children for risk factors (including depression, increased parenting stress, domestic violence, developmental delays, health and wellness, etc.) and referring to appropriate supports and services
- Working together with families to set and achieve family goals
- Helping young families negotiate complex systems (housing support, employment searches and applications, medical insurance)
- Providing a multitude of opportunities for families to engage with other families and community. Eliminating some of the barriers such as transportation the scheduling of events at non-traditional times (evenings or weekends)

Research on Nurturing Families Network in Connecticut has shown that families are "better off" having participated in the program. Families are staying engaged for long periods (2+ years), families are setting and achieving goals, families are creating more safe and nurturing environments, children are being referred to and receiving necessary services (medical and developmental) that otherwise may have been missed, families are participating in family events-reducing isolation and fathers are engaging in the lives of their children beginning during pregnancy.

While unable to attend the public hearing and testify in person, I believe that parent voices should be heard. Here are a couple excerpts from letters and feedback provided to our program.

A.G.-Mother: "Meeting with someone who bonds with your child while you do creates a safe place for worries and questions." "This program is important to women and children and I hope it continues to be funded so it can help parents thrive during their journey called parenthood."

M.M.-Mother: "The program has helped myself being a first time mom, prepare for a new baby. The program provided resources to aid me to be a great mom." "This program is beneficial in many ways, it has helped me set goals and reach them."

A.B.-Mother: "I am in full support of this program and would not like to see it lose funding as this program has given us experiences that as a first time mother would otherwise not be able to be exposed to." "The staff work tirelessly with our family to make sure that our son is hitting all his educational marks as expected."

D.H.-Father: "I am a single dad raising my 3 year old daughter on my own. I have been working with Families First (NFN) program since a little before she was born. This program has been one of my biggest resources to helping me be able to raise my child on my own."

I urge you to not reduce funding for Nurturing Families Network program. These above families, as well as all of the families and children we serve, need and benefit in an exponential way from the services provided through this home visitation program.

I would also like to note that I opposed to the Governor's proposed generic Agency Operations Budgeting. We need line item budgeting. CT residents deserve transparency.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 860-886-6600 ext.150 or by email at afigueroa@madonnaplace.org.

Thank you for your time.