

February 15, 2016

To: CGA Appropriations Committee Chairpersons Senator Beth Bye and Representative Toni Walker and Office of Early Childhood Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor

Re: Concern about Governor Malloy's Proposed Budget

My name is Karen Steinberg Gallucci. I am a clinical psychologist, educator, and early childhood researcher. In my position in the department of psychiatry at the UConn Health School of Medicine, I oversee several programs funded by the Office of Early Childhood. I direct a Nurturing Families site at our hospital, a statewide home-based maternal depression counseling service, and the Mind Over Mood, which is a new initiative aimed at linking new mothers with mental health concerns such as depression or anxiety with competent clinicians in their communities. These programs, along with other programs under the direction of the OEC, provide critical services to high risk families with young children.

Nurturing Families is a primary and secondary prevention program serving first time mothers and fathers in Connecticut. It seeks to screen and assess for risk factors associated child abuse and neglect and provide targeted services to vulnerable families based upon identified needs. I have seen firsthand how these services clearly help families. Home visitors are able to assist families by offering developmental guidance, information about attachment and parent-child relationships, as well as practical needs and resource referrals. Home visitors may be involved during the early and critical months and years of a child's life, thus helping to reduce risk factors and promote protective factors that mitigate against adverse developmental trajectories. Recent data from a Yale study of 8,000 new families compared families who received NFN services vs. a matched control group who did not found that, over a 5-year period, there was a 30% lower child welfare substantiation rate among the NFN families. These data provide encouraging support for the idea that NFN is benefiting children and families by reducing or preventing child abuse and neglect. NFN is an evidence-based program that has been benefiting families in CT and needs continued support in order to maintain these valuable and critical services. In addition, CT stands to lose millions of dollars in Federal support through MIECHV if it reduces home visitation services in CT below levels in 2010. For example, last year CT received \$29 million from MIECHV. These monies would be jeopardized if CT cuts funding for home visitation.

Let me share with you some of the work that we do in Nurturing Families at UConn Health- NFN programs across the state provide these services to families in their communities promoting and protecting the safety and well-being of newborns, infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. As a hospital-based program, we are relied on by our Pediatrics providers, our Genetics team including the MotherToBaby CT program, our OB/GYN providers, our hospital social workers including our NICU and OB/GYN social workers- these hospital-based professionals are desperately trying to meet the myriad needs of parents who are struggling to understand and cope with their infant and young child's development from breastfeeding to autism, postpartum depression to preschool enrollment. The Nurturing Families program necessitates families' transition to early parenting from hospital to home; maternity visiting providing psychoeducation on infant crying behavior, infant states of consciousness, postpartum depression, breastfeeding resources and triage to early childhood home visitation. Our hospital based programs meet with thousands of families yearly, serving as a point of contact for parenting supports and resources for all parents in Connecticut. Our prenatal group programs fill tremendous gaps in education and support with comprehensive programming that engages and empowers parents to care for their infants that ensures safe sleep, frustration tolerance and secure attachment. Our early childhood home visitation program serves families on a weekly basis providing parent education, child developmental screening, case management, perinatal depression screening and triage to treatment and care, and parent-child interaction activities. Each hospital based postpartum telephone and group program serve more than one hundred families yearly. Our program provides parent education and support to families in the NICU, infant care class and

pediatric and OB/GYN in-service trainings. Finally, our program promotes an infant mental health, perinatal mental health and attachment workforce through our trainings within the Nurturing Families Network as well as the larger early childhood community.

The Nurturing Families Network has been on the forefront of developing perinatal mental health infrastructure in Connecticut. Our work with depressed mothers has had strong findings. University of Hartford, in collaboration with staff at our program, recently completed a final report on a randomized controlled trial of in-home psychotherapy for maternal depression within NFN families. We report that mothers who received the experimental treatment showed greater reductions in symptoms of depression compared with the control group. Given the considerable risks both to mothers and their offspring of untreated depression, these findings are encouraging and warrant continued support for these types of interventions. Following the study, we have continued to provide this in-home clinical service to mothers statewide. Our data show that women who received the in-home therapy reduced their depression symptoms substantially, moving from the clinical to non-clinical range by the end of their treatment.

Early childhood programs are in fact, “basic services”. Infants and young children are vulnerable populations that deserve our care and attention. Pregnancy, birth, postpartum and early parenting are considered in the clinical literature periods of life crisis. It is remarkable the needs we see across Connecticut- isolated parents lacking family support due to sociocultural shifts in employment patterns and opportunities- parents who come to Connecticut expecting these programs and services to exist- parents confused about how to identify services in their communities- parents whose perinatal mental health needs would otherwise go unnoticed without the universal and periodic maternal depression screening provided by NFN programs statewide- parents who are poor or extremely poor needing home-based services to meet their children’s developmental and attachment needs. It is also important to note that NFN services are available in every town in Connecticut!

It is our understanding that in order to continue to qualify for federal funding for Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation (MIECHV), Connecticut needs to maintain its early childhood home visitation infrastructure. Cuts to the Nurturing Families programs provided by both state and federal dollars, jeopardize our state’s eligibility for over \$29 million in federal funding.

My team and I are happy to answer any questions you may have about our work and necessity of early childhood services to Connecticut perinatal and early childhood families.

Sincerely,

Karen Steinberg Gallucci, Ph.D.  
Program Manager Nurturing Families and Mind Over Mood programs  
UConn Health  
270 Farmington Avenue Suite 181  
Farmington CT 06030-1323  
860-679-3712  
[Ksteinberg@uchc.edu](mailto:Ksteinberg@uchc.edu)  
<http://nurturingfamilies.uchc.edu>