



CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND COUNCIL

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Senator Looney, Representative Miner and distinguished members of the Gun Violence Working Group, on behalf of The Children's Trust Fund Council and the more than 200 home visitors of the Children's Trust Fund, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to you today.

Once again, senseless violence has stolen innocent children from our midst. Violence, especially gun violence, has become a public health crisis in the United States. Much attention is being given to more stringent gun laws, but little attention is being given to many investments in children that have been proven by rigorous scientific research to reduce the likelihood of later violence and crime.

Voluntary, evidence based home visiting programs for at-risk pregnant women and parents of young children not only reduce child abuse and neglect by nearly 50%, but also work to profoundly reduce youth violence. A fifteen year longitudinal study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, showed home visitation programs can cut in half arrests by age 15 and convictions by age 19.¹

National reviews of several decades of research have found home visitation is an effective deterrent for violence:

- ◆ A report by the Surgeon General concluded that **home visitation "has shown significant long term effects on violence, delinquency, and related risk factors in a number of studies."**²

- ♦ The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence recommends **home visiting for preventing child abuse and neglect and child violence among other benefits.**ⁱⁱⁱ
- ♦ The Office of Justice Program review, *Preventing Crime, What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising* also gives high ratings to **early home visitation for preventing crime** and its risk factors.^{iv}
- ♦ The CDC cites home visitation approach among the **best practices for preventing youth violence.**^v

Globally, the World Health Organization report *Violence Prevention: The Evidence* has stated that violence can be prevented not as an article of faith, but a statement based on evidence. The first of 7 strategies recommended is:

“Developing safe, stable nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers through home visitation.”^{vi}

In Connecticut, two programs of the Children's Trust Fund (Nurturing Families Network and Family School Connection) provide home visitation by trained personnel who provide some combination of information, support and training about parenting and child health, development and care. Nurturing Families Network provides services to families during the child's first 5 years of life and Family School Connection provides services to families with elementary school children. Connecticut also fortunate to have two home visitation programs that provide mental health services: the Children's Trust Fund provides voluntary cognitive behavioral therapy for mothers with depression through an enhanced Nurturing Families Network and Child First provides mental health treatment to families in DCF. Home visiting is not simply a social program, rather it is a *proven strategy* to reduce child abuse, improve family functioning and decrease future family violence.

While there have been recent federal investments in Connecticut's home visiting programs, Connecticut still has work to do to ensure that every family in need of home visiting services may receive them. The benefits of such investments go beyond creating a safer environment for our children; a cost benefit of one home visiting program produced net societal savings of nearly \$13,000 for every family served from preventing violence.^{vii}

As we respond to the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary school, we must start amassing the public and political will to prioritize state and federal investment in our children that can give them the right start in life, reduce crime and violence and give us the best hope of preventing such tragedies in the future. Sensible gun regulations and support for mental health treatment efforts are important, but must complement strategic investments in proven violence prevention strategies like home visiting programs.

The members of the Children's Trust Fund Council are eager to work with you to develop any aspect of policy or legislation where our expertise can assist you.

¹ Olds DL, Henderson CR Jr, Cole R, et al. Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on children's criminal and antisocial behavior: 15-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial. *JAMA* 1998;280:1238-44.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Youth violence: a report of the Surgeon General. Washington DC: Department of Health and Human Services, 2001.

ⁱⁱⁱ Olds DL, Hill P, Mihalic SF, O'Brien R. Prenatal and infancy home visitation by nurses. In: Elliott DS, ed. *Blueprints for violence prevention*. Boulder CO: Center for the study and prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1998:1-97.

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v

Thornton TN, Craft CA, Dahlberg LL, Lynch BS, Baer K. Best practices of youth violence prevention: a sourcebook for community action. Atlanta GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000

vi

Center for Public Health Report, Violence Prevention: The Evidence. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2009.

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/4th_milestones_meeting/evidence_briefings_all.pdf

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