

**Testimony of Karen Foley-Schain, M. A., M. Ed., LPC
Executive Director, State of Connecticut Children's Trust Fund
410 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106 (860) 418-8761**

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Thank you Senator Dodd and Senator Alexander, and members of the Subcommittee on Children and Families for this opportunity to testify today on the reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

I am here today to tell you a good news story. The good news is this:

The state of Connecticut has been making steady progress in its efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect.

What is behind this progress? CAPTA.

CAPTA has been a catalyst for increasing the state's efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. CAPTA has enabled us to raise awareness of the need to prevent child abuse and neglect and to enlist the support of many in this cause.

CAPTA has provided the state with the opportunity to show that prevention programs make a real difference in the lives of children and families and to make the case that those prevention efforts must be supported.

As a result the state has increased its investment in child abuse and neglect prevention from less than \$1 million a decade ago to more than \$ 14 million today. National and local foundations and individual donors have also supported this cause by contributing more than \$1 million dollars in the just the past few years.

CAPTA funds, and the additional state and private sector donations they have been able to attract, are an investment paying real dividends. These dividends come in the form of reduced numbers of new cases of child abuse and neglect, and better outcomes for children and families.

The Children's Trust Fund is Connecticut's lead agency for CAPTA Title II - Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (CBCAP). The Trust Fund currently receives about \$ 700,000 thousand dollars in CAPTA funds each year.

The Trust Fund is a state agency in the executive branch of government. The Trust Fund reports to the Governor and the Connecticut General Assembly. A sixteen-member

council made up of legislative and executive branch appointees, who represent the business and social services community, parents and a pediatrician, oversees its efforts.

CAPTA Title II:

Community Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (CBCAP)

The CAPTA CBCAP program has provided the vision for everything we do at the Children's Trust Fund. This program had led us to finding the most effective means of assisting and strengthening families in order to prevent child abuse and neglect, funding a broad range of organizations to implement these programs, conducting research to assess their effectiveness and developing strategies for improving our efforts.

We primarily use the CAPTA funds to implement and test innovations in the field and to support the professional development of our state contracted and other human services staff.

At this time CAPTA funds are largely being used to support three major initiatives. They include:

- Preventing shaken baby syndrome
- Preventing childhood sexual abuse
- Training human services staff to better engage and support families in prevention efforts

The funds are also being used to research the effectiveness of these initiatives and to develop strategies to improve them.

Shaken Baby Syndrome:

Inspired by the work of Dr. Mark Dias in up-state New York, the Children's Trust Fund launched a multifaceted program to prevent shaken baby syndrome. The goal of this effort is to get the message to all new parents - and those who care for children - that they should never under any circumstance shake a baby.

Shaken baby syndrome is the most lethal and severe form of child abuse. Experts estimate that several children die and that hundreds more are hospitalized and face debilitating and permanent injuries each year in Connecticut as a result of this tragic problem.

Research also shows that this problem is more wide spread than is often thought. Many children who are diagnosed with shaken baby syndrome are found to have histories of head injury and other symptoms related to milder shaking.

Through the *Shaken Baby Prevention Project* the Trust Fund staff has trained hospital and medical professionals and community service providers throughout Connecticut on methods to prevent shaken baby syndrome. This effort has led to ongoing programs and research efforts within several hospitals.

In addition hundreds of high school and middle school students and parents of young children have participated in community education programs on this topic. The Trust Fund has embedded these strategies into its home visiting program for new parents and encouraged other service providers to do the same.

The Trust Fund is working with the University of Connecticut to examine the effectiveness of these efforts.

The Stranger You Know

The Trust Fund, in collaboration with several state agencies and children's organization, conducted a research project to assess the nature of childhood sexual abuse in Connecticut and programs that were available to prevent it.

The research found that most child sexual abuse prevention programs promoted a fear of strangers and relied on children to say "no" to molesters by teaching them the difference between "good and bad touch."

This approach seemed at odds with what we learned about childhood sexual abuse in the state.

We found that it was unrealistic to expect children to protect themselves when they were emotionally, and sometimes physically, overwhelmed by someone much larger.

We also found that the greatest threat to children does not come from strangers. In fact, we learned that about 90% of children personally knew their molester - about half were relatives and half were trusted adults known to the child and their family through school, sports, religion and other social ties.

As a result we developed *The Stranger You Know...* a program that reflects the understanding gained through the research. The program transfers the responsibility for keeping children safe from children to adults.

The program gives adults information about how child molesters successfully offend against children. It helps parents see patterns of behavior that represent danger and provides them with steps to take to keep their children safe.

The Stranger You Know... began as a pilot program in one Connecticut community. A study of the pilot found that participants were more aware of child sexual abuse and how to keep children safe. The study also found that the program's message extended

beyond the individuals who attended the presentation as a result of word of mouth exchanges.

To date the program has reached 1,000 parents in Connecticut.

Family Development Training and Credentialing (FDC)

The Children's Trust Fund is working with the University of Connecticut Center for the Study of Culture, Health and Human Development, to teach human service providers new skills for working with families.

This training program teaches skills that help service providers engage families on a voluntary basis before they become involved with state mandated services. The program teaches providers how to best assist families to build on their strengths and to develop a healthy self-reliance and interdependence with others in their community.

Organizations have found that this training leads to a more cohesive workplace, that staff do a better job, and the interventions with families become more successful.

This year the Trust Fund will work with the 12 Community Action Agencies (CAP) in Connecticut to provide this training to more than 500 front line and leadership staff.

Connecticut has credentialed roughly 600 students in this program.

Leveraged Funds - State and Private Sector Funding

CAPTA funds have enabled Connecticut to set an agenda for the prevention of child abuse and neglect. It has helped create a real momentum for the development of additional programs to support children and families.

This effort also grew out of a recognition that the courts, the Department of Children and Families, our school and other helping agencies are stretched beyond the limits in attempting to deal with the wide variety of issues facing children and families. They have seen more and more resources and more and more funding being directed to addressing children and families after a crisis has occurred - when it much more difficult and costly to intervene. This has led many policy makers to ask if more can be done to avoid these problems.

The search for this type of solution – which is at the heart of CAPTA - was a perfect match for the efforts and mission of the Children's Trust Fund. As a result, the Trust Fund was given additional resources and responsibilities for a number of programs focused on preventing child abuse and neglect and ensuring the healthy development of Connecticut's children.

The Nurturing Families Network (NFN)

Chief among these has been the development of *Nurturing Families Network*. The program's focus is on providing intensive home visiting services to high risk families at a critical time in their lives - when their first child is born.

Why home visiting?

The Trust Fund choose to focus on home visiting because this approach has been shown to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect, to improve parent child relationships and lead to better outcomes for both parents and children.

A number of evaluations have found that children whose parents participate in a home visiting program have better birth outcomes, stronger literacy skills, more social competence, and higher levels of school readiness than their peers whose parents were not enrolled in this type of program.

Evaluations have also shown significant achievements for parents who participate in home visiting programs. These include gains in employment and education, stable households, and access to health care.

Initially the Trust Fund implemented the *Healthy Families America* home visiting model. Given the mixed results of national evaluations and issues identified through our own research we decided to go in a different direction.

We considered using a program of nurse home visitors. However, given high nursing salaries and a severe shortage of nurses in Connecticut we decided it was not feasible to go this way.

We also considered programs that focused on child development. While these programs had strong results in some areas, research suggested that they were not as effective when working with high risk populations - and they did not have a strong focus on preventing child abuse and neglect.

As a result the Trust Fund worked closely with researchers at the University of Hartford Center for Social Research and a continuous quality improvement team to begin the work of establishing a new model.

Through these efforts we fleshed out the strengths of *Healthy Families* and identified gaps and barriers in the model. We changed, modified and revised these areas. We added "best practices" that were identified in the field. We tested these new approaches, worked on implementation strategies, developed a comprehensive training program for all staff and developed an integrated set of program policies and practice standards that would ensure program quality.

As a result we have established a home visiting model that reflects state of the art practice. The model is based on a solid theory of change, recognizes the value and importance of the relationship between the families and the staff, while applying the most recent science on child development and parenting practices, employing master level clinical supervisors, and requiring extensive training and credentialing for its home visiting staff and other staff.

The program model integrated the highly regarded *Parents as Teachers* curriculum into the home visiting service. We see the addition of this curriculum as a real strength of the program.

Let me tell you a bit about the *Nurturing Families Network* in Connecticut.

The *Nurturing Families Network* is providing services to families giving birth at all of the twenty-nine birthing hospitals in the state. Services are offered at forty-two locations with expanded programs in the cities of Hartford and New Haven.

The *Nurturing Families Network* provides parent education and support for 5,000 new parents each year, including *Nurturing Parenting* groups that are open to the community. The *Nurturing Parenting* group program has received proven program status through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency.

The program offers intensive home visiting for high risk and hard to reach families living in poverty. The program connects high-risk parents with a home visitor who meets with the family on a weekly basis for up to five years. Roughly thirteen hundred new parents are receiving home visits under this program.

The home visitors work against a backdrop of unwanted babies, domestic violence and the high potential for child abuse or neglect to assist the parents to address many issues and to help break the family's social isolation. Through ongoing contact a trusting and meaningful professional relationship is formed. This relationship is at the core of the program's success.

The *Nurturing Families Network* has been rigorously researched and evaluated by the University of Hartford Center for Social Research. The results have been consistently strong.

Among the positive outcomes for this program are:

- The rate of child abuse and neglect is far lower for high-risk NFN participants than for similar families not in this type of program.¹

¹ This finding is based on comparative data from 3 studies of abuse and neglect rate for families identified at high risk using the Kempe Family Stress Checklist. The incidence of child abuse and neglect in the high-risk families identified by the Kempe participating in the Nurturing Families Network is 1.6% in 2006. *University of Hartford, 2007.* A two year study of prenatal mothers categorized into low and high-risk groups based on the Kempe found that 22 % of the high-risk mothers had abused or neglected their children versus 6 % of the low-risk parents. *Steven-Simon, Child Abuse and Neglect, 2001.* A two year study comparing medical charts two years after the children's birth to families defined

- Program participants experienced a significant decrease in parental frustration, sadness and loneliness and an increase in coping and stress management skills, developed more realistic expectations of their children, and had fewer difficulties in relationships.²
- Program participants made statistically significant gains in education and employment.³

We will continue to offer and study this program. The *Nurturing Families Network* is a program that can help more families and more children have a better life.

In addition to state funding this program received grant support from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, several local United Ways, and municipal governments.

Family School Connection

I would also like to tell you about a new program the Trust Fund has recently piloted in Hartford, Connecticut - the *Family/School Connection* (FSC).

The program provides home visiting and support services to families whose children are struggling with truancy, behavioral or academic issues at school – and are likely to be struggling at home.

at-risk on the Kempe and those defined as no risk found that 25 % of the children in the at-risk group had been victims of abuse, neglect, or failure to thrive. The rate was 2 % for the no-risk group. Murphy, *Child Abuse and Neglect, 1985* Neglect, 1985

² This finding is based on pre-post measures on the Child Abuse Potential Inventory and the Community Life Skills Scale. The Child Abuse Potential Inventory (CAPI) is a standardized instrument designed to measure someone's potential to abuse or neglect children. The CAPI is widely used and well researched. The Community Life Skills Scale (CLS) is a standardized instrument designed to measure someone's knowledge and use of community resources and support. The outcome data on program participants is positive. The data suggest that the mothers are developing strategies to better cope with stress, are developing less rigid attitudes and expectations about their children, and are taking more responsibility for their lives. The results of the Community Life Skills Scale are also positive. Mothers showed an increased awareness and use of resources in their community. Specifically the mothers had greater access to public and private transportation, more supportive relationships with friends and families and a decrease in social isolation.

³ The University of Hartford examined mother's employment and education data by age cohort, analyzing data for mothers who were 19 or younger when they had their child and those who were 20 and older. Among the younger cohort 83% enter the program without a high school diploma. Roughly 50% of this group were in high school or a GED program during their first year of parenthood to receive their diploma. Among the older cohort 50% more mothers were enrolled in school after year in the program than at the time of program entry - including high school, college, vocational and other schools. Among both cohorts the number of mother enrolled in and completing school continues to increase with each of program involvement. Among the younger cohort the percentage of the mothers in the workforce increases from 11% to 35%.

Family School Connection is modeled after the highly successful *Nurturing Families* home-visiting program. *Family School Connection* extends the *Nurturing Families* model to families with elementary school children (ages 5-12).

Performance measures for this program have found that parents who participated made statistically significant gains in the following areas:

- The participants had healthier parenting attitudes and experienced less parenting stress.¹
- The participants were more accepting and had more realistic expectations of their children.²
- The participants were more involved in their child's academic life.³

This program shows a great deal of promise. The Children's Trust Fund is in the process of expanding this from a pilot program based at Betances Elementary School in Hartford to four new sites in Middletown, Windham, Norwich and New Haven.

This program was developed in collaboration with the Jr. League of Greater Hartford and Hands on Hartford, formerly, Center City Churches.

We are also working with Deveroux Foundation to incorporate a new tool for assessing the social and emotional development of school age children into the program.

Help Me Grow

The final program I want to discuss is *Help Me Grow*.

¹ The University of Hartford Center for Social Research is using the Parenting Stress Index- Short Form¹ (PSI-SF) to measure parenting and family characteristics that fail to promote normal development and functioning in children. The Parenting Stress Index is significantly correlated with measures of neglectful parenting and other measures of abusive parenting. Outcome data from the families participating in the program at entrance and six months show a significant ($p < .05$) change in the desired direction indicating healthier parenting attitudes.

² The PSI-SF also identifies parents who are at risk for dysfunctional parenting. The Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction subscale measures parents' perceptions of whether their child meets their expectations and the degree to which parents feel their children are a negative aspect of their lives. Higher scores on this subscale indicate an inadequate parent-child bond. Outcome data from the families participating in the program at entry and six months show a significant ($p < .05$) change in the desired direction indicating that parents are more accepting and have more realistic expectations of their children.

³ The researchers used the Parent-School Involvement Survey to examine parent's perception of their school involvement. The survey assessed the parents' perceptions of their child's school, the time they spend with their child doing school-based activities such as reading, helping with homework or volunteering at the school. The outcome measures were administered when families entered the program and then after six months of program involvement. There was change in the desired direction indicating that parents had become more involved in their child's academic life.

Help Me Grow is a prevention program for all children who experience the developmental challenges that go hand-and-hand with growing up. Children who are facing behavioral, learning or other developmental issues are connected to local programs that can provide expertise and assistance.

Help Me Grow trains parents, pediatric and other providers to recognize the early signs of developmental problems and to contact *Help Me Grow* when they have a concern.

The research on *Help Me* shows:

- The demand for the program has grown. *Help Me Grow* received 3,300 calls last year, up by 16% from the previous year. The number of services requested by each caller also increased. As a result there was a 60% increase in referrals to community-based services.
- There is a high level of success in connecting families to services. 86% percent of families referred to *Help Me Grow* during the past year were connected to services.
- Participation rates in the *Help Me Grow* 'Ages & Stages Child Monitoring Program' increased by 4% from last year. This figure is up by 13% from two years ago.

It is also worth noting that research on the training efforts of *Help Me Grow* indicate that following the training pediatric providers identify children with developmental and behavioral risks twice as often. The training increases their awareness and this allows them to recognize more children and families in need.

Over the next two years the Children's Trust Fund plans to distribute the 'Ages and Stages Child Monitoring' tool to all pediatric providers across the state. Through this effort the Trust Fund will encourage all pediatric providers to monitor child development and to provide the 'Ages and Stages' kits to all parents when their babies are four months old.

The Children's Trust Fund received a grant award from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to enhance the capacity of *Help Me Grow* to reach and engage hard to reach families. These include families who do not have a phone or who have complex needs. The Trust Fund is currently piloting this effort in city of Hartford.

In addition the Commonwealth Fund in Boston is funding an effort to replicate *Help Me Grow* nationally. The Children's Medical Center will be administering this effort. We are glad to see that our work in Connecticut will be of help to others.

Next Steps:

While Trust Fund efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect have made significant strides over the past decade, we recognize that there is still much to be done. The Trust Fund has identified two priorities for further program development.

The Children's Trust Fund will be working with Drs. Frank Putnam and Robert Amerman at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital to offer and study an in-home cognitive behavioral therapy for treating mothers with depression who are participating in the *Nurturing Families Network*.

Research on mothers shows that depression has a dramatic negative effect on maternal functioning, including an increased risk for abuse and neglect. In addition maternal depression has negative effects on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children. Despite these findings most depressed mothers do not receive treatment.

Programs like the *Nurturing Families Network* were built on the assumption that this type of service could be found in the community and that the role of the program was to help mothers to receive these services.

At the current time, however, there are few options for mothers to receive this type of service. As a result we have determined that the service must be integrated into the home visiting program itself.

The in-home cognitive behavioral approach we will be testing is designed to be closely aligned with the home visiting service. The program has been successfully implemented in Ohio where 85% of the mothers received the full number of treatment sessions, and 85% had full or partial remission of their depression.

A second area of focus is on fathers and men.

Research shows that children fare better when both parents are involved in their lives. The Children's Trust Fund is taking steps to research and develop a program component within the *Nurturing Families Network* specifically for fathers and men who are significant in the lives of children participating in the program.

This component would be well integrated in the *Network* but would be different in several important ways – the staff would develop outreach strategies and activities tailored to men, work with fathers who are not living with their children, and offer a full range of home visiting and group services.

While Connecticut and other states have important efforts focused on fathers and men they tend to be for those that have developed significant problems with child support, the courts, and child protective services. The fathers tend to be estranged from their children. In Connecticut the average age for fathers in this type of program is 31.

In the *Nurturing Families Network* the average age of fathers is 21. This age difference gives us a full decade to prevent some of these problems from developing and to help fathers and men have meaningful and nurturing relationships with the children in their lives.

I would recommend that states be encouraged to work on these issues through CAPTA reauthorization. It seems that once the field is focused on an issue we learn very quickly what works, what doesn't and what is worth a try. These issues merit that type of thinking and focus.

In Closing:

As you can see, the programs administered by the Trust Fund are working. We are strongly committed to the goal of CAPTA, offering a solid program, getting strong results, helping to improve the lives of children and families all across the state of Connecticut and preventing child abuse and neglect.

CAPTA has given gave us an important focus and a helpful hand to build on our efforts over the years.

We hope that you will reauthorize CAPTA at the highest level possible and continue to support our efforts and those of children's trust and prevention funds across the country who are also administering this important program.

Your support allows each of us to make a unique and important contribution to children and families across the United States.

Thank you.