

Testimony of Jason Malcolm, Program Manager

Fatherhood Initiative

Madonna Place, Inc.

240 Main Street

Norwich, CT 06360

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

As the program manager of a DSS Certified Fatherhood Initiative Program and a DCF-funded Fatherhood Engagement Program at Madonna Place, my focus is to support, advocate for, educate, and provide assistance to fathers in southeastern Connecticut. Due to my position and the important work we do in our program, I am testifying on behalf of our agency and other nonprofits across the state with regard to continued stagnation or reduction of funding for nonprofit programs statewide. I am grateful that our funding has not been reduced, as has been on the table in the past, but for several years we have seen our funding either hold steady or be reduced without fail in each budget session.

Fatherhood programs are essential to addressing the issues of child poverty and are key in supporting and advocating for fathers to increase their engagement and quality of that engagement with their children. Research has consistently demonstrated that children do better when both of their parents are involved in their lives; the absence of either parent often has a negative impact on a child's behavior along with their emotional development, and it is our goal to provide fathers with the tools they need to be engaged parents in the lives of their children and effective co-parents with the mothers of their children. Some barriers that fathers face to meeting these goals involve a history of incarceration, unemployment or underemployment, history of substance abuse, domestic violence issues, mental illness, a poor relationship with the mother of their child or children, involvement with the Department of Children and Families, lack of safe housing, lack of reliable transportation, and often a general lack of basic needs resources.

Madonna Place has been a part of the Fatherhood Initiative since the passing of related legislation in 1999 and is one of six currently-funded state certified sites currently providing comprehensive services to fathers and other men who are significant in the lives of their children. As the only certified Fatherhood Program east of Hartford in the southeastern part of the state, we serve a wide geographic area and currently have four staff, including myself, to meet this great need. The past two years we have served over 200 fathers per year, and close to 400 children, often with two staff or less; an increase in funding would allow for more staffing to serve more fathers in the wide geographic area that is southeastern Connecticut, along with more completely service DCF Region 3 in our work specifically with DCF-involved fathers and their children. This work directly impacts the welfare of children in our corner of the state, addressing systemic issues with fatherhood engagement and supporting fathers in advocating for

themselves, their children, and with regard to their continued positive presence in their children's lives. Other programs across the state are doing the same or similar work with fathers; what I am calling for is a boost in funding to our agency and other agencies like it who are working on the ground level with individuals who give back to the state of Connecticut economically and socially every day who are looking for support in raising their children safely and successfully so they can one day do the same and give back to the state they call home.

Connecticut has been a leader for fatherhood work for nearly twenty years, and we value our involvement in this mission. We are committed to helping fathers become, or remain, fully responsible in the lives of their children and co-parents through maintaining employment, increasing their level of parenting skill, getting them on track with paying child support, and increasing the amount of time spent with their children. Our ability to continue this work relies upon continued funding at the state level, and as our partnerships grow with DSS and DCF the need of the clientele we work with grows as well. As such, I am confident in asking that the state legislature vote to make use of available state funding to provide a boost to these nonprofit agencies such as Madonna Place across the state who are doing grassroots, community-level work to strengthen and maintain families across Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and attention regarding this matter.