

**Testimony to the Senate Standing Committee on Finance
Regarding the Governor's Proposed Deficit Reduction Plan**

**Tuesday, October 27th, 2009
Brookhaven Town Hall, Farmingville, New York**

My name is Carol McNally. I am the Executive Director of the Center for Restorative Practices in Suffolk County, a licensed social worker (LMSW) and a member of the Board of Directors of Prevent Child Abuse New York. I have worked for 25 years in state and county government as a public information specialist.

During these 25 years or more, Prevent Child Abuse New York has been the state's leading organization focused on preventing child maltreatment before it occurs – by engaging communities in the important work of strengthening families and valuing children.

Children are less likely to be abused or neglected when their families have strong connections to systems of support, such as faith groups, libraries, and community centers, and when families and caregivers better understand their child's development, needs, and abilities.

Child abuse is everyone's problem. The short- and long-term consequences of abuse are wide ranging and affect us all. Victims of abuse suffer medical and developmental problems. They are more likely to become hostile and aggressive or withdrawn and depressed.

Survivors of abuse are at high risk for problems that affect society as a whole – such as drug use, criminal behavior, and severe, chronic illnesses. The direct and indirect consequences of child abuse cost New York State more than \$2.4 billion every year.

Attached to this testimony is an executive summary from a report issued by Fight Crime, Invest in Kids, an organization that represents NY State's Law Enforcement community. The title of the report is ***“Protect Kids, Reduce Crime, Save Money, Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect”***.

Reading from the letter signed by the President of the NYS Association of Chiefs of Police and the President of the NYS Sheriffs' Association, I quote:

*“Preventing abuse and neglect is one of the most powerful steps we can take to prevent crime and violence. When asked in a survey to identify the strategy to reduce youth crime that has the “highest value”, New York State's police chiefs selected **“parent coaching for high risk families”** by a three-to-one margin over ‘prosecuting more juveniles as adults’ and by a seven to one margin over “metal detectors in schools.”*

As an organization with prevention partners across the state, we are aware of the difficult decisions that you, the New York State Legislature, and all New Yorkers face. Organizations working with children and families are not immune from the need to create more cost-efficient systems, making tough choices to cut back on non-essential services. However, the prevention of child abuse and the protection of our children is not non-essential.

Among the competing priorities for precious state funds, one thing is clear: First and foremost is government's responsibility to provide for the public safety of its citizens. Preventing abuse and neglect is one of the most powerful steps we can take to prevent crime and violence.

Last year, Prevent Child Abuse New York reminded the Governor and the Legislature that more than five-thousand infants under the age of 1 would be abused and neglected in 2009. The Legislature heard the message – and acted on it – by restoring funding for most of New York's child abuse prevention activities, including prenatal and early childhood home visiting programs.

Yet today we continue to struggle to protect our state's most vulnerable children. The Governor's Deficit Reduction Plan only exacerbates the problem.

Since the year 2000, child maltreatment rates in New York have increased by 25%. They continue to rise exponentially during these difficult economic times.

Simply put, kids can't wait.

The child abuse prevention choices we make today will shape the future of our state and nation. Huge investments in early childhood well-being have emerged as part of the President's budget, and separately as legislation in the US Congress.

Prenatal and infancy home visitation, a proven prevention approach, is funded through a variety of sources. The most prevalent is funding that supports Healthy Families New York home visiting, in the Health and Human Services Budget and administered by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services. In the 2007-08 budget, New York funded this program completely with state dollars. But in the 2009-10 budget, approximately 25% is federal funding, from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families allocation.

If current funding for home visitation services is reduced by 10% - or at all - New York essentially becomes ineligible for any of the Federal healthcare dollars that would support the expansion of home visitation across the state. This is because Federal healthcare reform stipulates a state maintenance of effort on the Federal fiscal year of October 1, 2008 to September 30, 2009.

The maintenance-of-effort requirement is a complicated issue that we would be happy to discuss with you in a timeframe longer than ten minutes. Staff at Prevent Child Abuse New York will be following up with you over the next few days.

But simply put, cutting funds for Healthy Families New York home visiting takes New York out of line to receive \$50 to \$60 million in Federal funding.

Turning to another critical area: Even under current funding, prevention programs are reaching only a small portion of the families who need them. Child maltreatment cases continue to rise. Given those increases, it is simply wrong to slash funding for child advocacy centers. Child victims and their families find safety, expert help, support and the treatment services they need at Child Advocacy Centers. Not only must we not eliminate support for prevention, we also must not close the door on essential community-based interventions for abused children.

Regarding Federal funding: It's clear that neither the Division of the Budget nor the state agency representatives have had the opportunity to quantify the crushing blow of some of the proposed cuts will deliver to our Federal match dollars. For example, the New York State Children and Family Trust Fund (Hoyt Trust Fund) provides matching monies for the Federal Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) spending. By reducing funding for the fund by a mere \$43,000, we have begun to decimate the Federal dollars that were once maximized.

Prevent Child Abuse New York strongly encourages legislators to examine each proposed reduction in detail, and with knowledge of fiscal consequences at the Federal and local level. To pass such a proposal without this due process is not only irresponsible, but is dangerous to New York's economic future.

Whereas Prevent Child Abuse New York has identified some specific program priorities, we also know that services that support families all must be held harmless to ensure the state's children have healthy and successful futures, including mental health, kinship care, fatherhood programs, and early care and education.

We understand the devastation this recession has rained on New York's economy. Colleague organizations, including the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy and the Better Choice Budget Coalition, have made suggestions for cost-cutting and revenue-enhancing measures that we hope you will strongly consider.

Even the Federal government is hearing and responding to the research-based child abuse prevention message. Yesterday, US Senator Charles Schumer announced legislation in memory of Erin Maxwell, who was killed as a result of maltreatment in September of 2008. We remind you that Erin resided in a community that the Governor's DRP would severely affect.

Prevention just makes s-e-n-s-e – as well as c-e-n-t-s! By holding harmless our investments in prevention today, the more we'll have to spend tomorrow. We simply cannot ignore the effects these cuts will have on our ability to access Federal dollars and save costs in both the short- and long-term.

Thank you for your time and consideration. In particular, thank you for listening to the testimony we and our colleagues have provided, and for thinking mindfully before making decisions with lifelong, multi-generational affects.

For more information on Prevent Child Abuse New York, its policy positions and programs, please contact Michelle Gross, Public Policy Manager, at 518-445-1273 or mgross@preventchildabuseny.org