

Testimony for the Joint Public Hearing of the Select Committee on Children

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My name is Ruth White, and I am the Executive Director of the National Center for Housing and Child Welfare. I would like to thank Senators, Meyer, Harris, Freedman, and Kissel, and Representatives McMahon, Villano, Ruwet, and Gibbons for your important work on this committee and for holding this hearing today. I appreciate the opportunity to address you today on the cost savings associated with keeping families together and safe through prudent investments in affordable housing and in-home supportive services.

For years, I have worked closely with the folks from the Connection, Inc. to learn about their work and bring this information to a national audience. The National Center for Housing and Child Welfare serves as a bridge between affordable housing resources and the child welfare system. We build partnerships in order to ensure that children do not enter or linger needlessly in foster care due to affordable housing problems.

The Center recently secured \$20 million in new funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Family Unification Program. Our success in educating the U.S. Congress is in large part due to our ability to highlight the enormously successful state-wide partnership here in Connecticut. This partnership is a nationally recognized model for collaboration, and indeed is widely considered the most efficient and effective Family Unification Program in the U.S. The Department of Families and Children, the Department of Social Services, and DMHAS are to be commended for embracing and growing this innovative program.

Families and in the child welfare system face many economic challenges. Child welfare agencies go to great lengths to remediate these issues and as a result, the majority of children reunite safely and successfully with their parents. However, nearly a third of the 500,000 children in the foster care system remain separated from their parents because their families lack safe, decent housing. This is an unwise and costly practice both in terms of the emotional toll levied upon each mother and child and in terms of the substantial cost to the American taxpayer.

On average, it costs nearly \$48,000 per family for children to enter foster care. By contrast, it costs just over \$15,000 annually to house one family and provide supportive services to support their stability in housing. The Center estimates that the state of Connecticut could actually save \$63 million in foster care expenditures by providing housing and supportive services to all families in the state who are separated because of affordable housing – assuming that number were 30% of all children in care.

Thankfully, because the leaders of DCF and DSS have grown their partnership over the past decade, Connecticut already has the infrastructure and evidence-based expertise to vastly expand this desperately needed service on behalf of all vulnerable families in the state. Through this partnership and the work of the Connection, Inc. over 1,129 families have found the stability and