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If you see a child being abused, is it your responsibility to try and stop it? If you suspect a child is being abused, is it your responsibility to report it? Most of us would answer “yes” to those questions.

If you have the ability to prevent child abuse before it happens, is it your responsibility to do so? Some policymakers in New York State don’t think it is.

The Governor on Tuesday proposed cutting the Healthy Families New York home visiting program by 25% and eliminating funding from child welfare that goes to the Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program.

Home visiting programs decrease child abuse and neglect, which generally increase in stressful times such as economic downturns. For example, over four decades of research by the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program show that its home visiting services cut child abuse nearly in half.

NFP home visiting programs are active in New York City and in Monroe and Onondaga counties. Approximately 1/3 of NFP funding in New York City comes from child welfare preventive spending. Sixty-five percent of Monroe County’s NFP funding and 27% of Onondaga County’s NFP funding is child welfare spending. The elimination of these dollars means that entire programs will cease serving an estimated 1,200 families.

Without funding these programs will not survive. Following the 8% budget cut of Healthy Families NY in August, about 500 families lost services. A larger cut will decimate programs and devastate families.

An elimination of home visiting programs means that parents will not receive education to strengthen parenting skills, support to help them raise healthy children, or referrals to other social service programs. Their children will become at greater risk for abuse.

Consider this: New York spends more than \$2.5 billion per year dealing with the consequences of child abuse. Yet it currently spends only about \$28 million on a combination of HFNY funding and child welfare funding for NFP—programs that are proven to prevent child abuse and neglect. If the state decreases funding and incidents of abuse increase, won’t we end up spending significantly more dealing with the consequences?

How many children need to be hurt or killed to make the point that prevention is cost effective?

Shouldn't we all be asking the state: If you have the ability to prevent child abuse before it happens, isn't it your responsibility to do so?

Signed and supported by:

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