

Good morning Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee.

My name is Carol Riccio-Greenberg, I am an Elderly Outreach Counselor for the Town of Hamden. As an Outreach Counselor, our jobs cover a myriad of duties that help our elderly clients. During the winter months we help the Community Action Agency of New Haven by doing the Energy Assistance Program we schedule and do the initial intake of the Energy Assistance applications for Community Action Agency (CAA) in New Haven. Completing our portion of the applications entails completing redundant paperwork and compiling documentation of the clients monthly income and their bank accounts.

During the same time period, we as outreach counselors also screen for other programs the client might be eligible for. Our applications then sit in a bin and wait for a runner from CAA to pick up the files. Community Action picks up applications at our office twice a week. Although we have no problem with the pick up schedule now, in the beginning of the season, CAA did not have a runner so the files sat in our office for up to a week. Finally after much complaining the solution was that they sent out one of their supervisors to pick up files once or twice a week.

Once the files leave our office CAA is supposed to "certify" the application, and notify the client in writing of their eligibility/ineligibility. A good many of our clients will tell you that they never receive their award letter in the mail. I am here to tell you that our office is ready willing and CAPABLE of certifying the energy assistance applications for our client thus making it a one stop program we feel that by instituting a "pilot program" and letting our office do the intake, certifying and electronically filing these applications with the state it

will make for a more efficient and and surely produce cost savings that can be put back towards client needs in a program that has been cut dramatically over the years.

I have been completing Energy Assistance Applications for Hamden residents approximately 20 years. Each year when you think it can't get any worse it does. Last year program was the straw that broke the camel's back. We had oil heating clients waiting for 2 months to receive approval. Although they (CAA) does have 45 days to process an application, this is not a reasonable time frame. After much frustration our clients started calling the Governors Office, DSS, TV stations, etc. and then and only then were there heating needs met.

We have found that when the media sheds a light on CAA or clients call their legislators Community Action will improve slightly during the following months, but usually within a year or so they revert back to their old ways. Our office works with the population aged 60 and above. One of the requirements put in within the last 10 years is that a client must get an authorization for oil when they are at a quarter of a tank. Most of our seniors do not go up and down their basement stairs and must guess when they are at quarter of a tank.

When calling CAA, they are met with a phone system (although it has improved since last year) is not user friendly. A good deal of our clients give up when they can't get anyone to answer a phone call to request an oil delivery. In turn, they contact us to call for them. If and when a client gets through the phone system, (although better this year) many times they are hung up on or given mis-information. At this time of year when clients have exhausted their "basic benefit" and are looking for a "safety net", clients have been left waiting for oil for up to 2 weeks. If clients are told not to call unless they are at a quarter of a tank, in cold weather a quarter of a tank will not wait for CAA to decide whether they want to process my clients application. Utility heating applications sit untouched for months at a time thus

increasing the chance of losing documentation or even the whole file, as has happen in the past.

I urge you to come to Hamden – speak to our clients – don't take our word for it. Many would be here if the logistics were different. I urge you to go to the surrounding communities and speak with the agencies that do the same work as we do. You will find that it is the same throughout our area. I urge those of you who administer the funds to come and speak with those of us who have direct client contact and we will help you streamline a program fraught with unnecessary paperwork and unnecessary time delays.

I urge your support for the pilot program in the New Haven Region of House Bill 7232 by implementing an expedited process as a pilot program for the municipalities served by the New Haven Community Action Agency.