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135 Broad Street
Hartford, CT 06105
(860) 247-6090
(860) 524-0804 Fax

Information and Referral

Greater Hartford
(860) 524-0601
Toll Free
(800) 479-2949

www.cwealf.org
email: cwealf@cwealf.org

Human Services Committee

Raised Bill #1275 An Act Concerning Adequate Staffing at the Department of Social Services and Raised Bill # 7302 An Act Concerning Rates Paid to Providers Under the Child Care Subsidy Program

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Testimony prepared by Alice Pritchard

Good morning. My name is Alice Pritchard and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization working to enhance the personal and professional lives of women, girls and their families. I am here today as a member of the Welfare Working Group and as the director of a women's rights organization which has worked for decades using different strategies from empowering individuals to advocating for legislative changes to ensure that women have access to tools and resources to become and remain economically self-sufficient.

I am here today to urge your support of bill 1275 which will allow the Department of Social Services to hire 200 staff and bill 7302 which will increase the reimbursement rate that licensed child care providers, who participate in the child care subsidy program, receive. Passing both of these bills will take steps towards addressing inadequate resources provided to low-income women and families in Connecticut.

In 2003, then Governor Rowland made devastating cuts to state jobs throughout Connecticut. These cuts were not made on either a fiscally or socially responsible plan. In the areas serving individuals who receive public assistance 150 staff jobs were cut. These cuts further exacerbated the already high caseloads of workers.

The caseload for a single DSS worker has reached *hundreds*. This drastically undermines their ability to provide services to individuals who are in need. The competing requirements of DSS workers to thoughtfully and thoroughly assess clients and the punitive federal requirements which demand that we reach high worker participation rates makes it impossible for workers to do their job well.

At CWEALF we have had the opportunity to work with staff from DSS and interview service providers throughout the state about their clients. A concern we hear from providers is that individuals who are referred often come with undisclosed barriers to being able to work. It will often take months or several attempts to place individuals into work participation activities before someone uncovers a barrier such as mental health issue. With the right plan and resources these barriers can often be addressed, and if not removed, at least managed. However, given the current structure, many precious months are ticked off a client's welfare clock before this happens; jeopardizing the benefits available over their lifetime.

Private providers have expressed concerned that DSS workers do not always return calls or follow through with appropriate actions for some clients. Rarely is this lack of action is perceived as incompetence by the DSS worker, rather, the understanding is that the overwhelming caseload impedes their ability to perform these tasks. Increasing the staff at DSS will begin the process of improving the services available

to our families in the most need. For these reasons I urge you to support Raised Bill 1275.

Raised Bill 7302 is another important support for families in Connecticut. People who are moving from public assistance to work need and deserve quality child care. The current reimbursement rate for licensed child care providers who participate in Connecticut's child care subsidy program is \$89/week for a child in full-time care. The Department of Health and Human Services suggested that the reimbursement rate for child care subsidy be set at 75%. This means that the rate cap equals or exceeds the rates charged for 75% of the care in the market. For Connecticut this rate only reaches 60%.¹

This rate affects number of available slots and impacts a provider's ability to maintain and improve their child care services. Child care centers have high turnover rates, low wages and often poor benefits. Increasing the reimbursement rate for providers will position providers to make improvements in their facilities, from increasing pay for workers to providing services for families and child in need.

Supporting these two bills will take a measured step toward enhancing the resources available to low-income people who are working toward becoming self-sufficient. Women and their families deserve more in Connecticut – and you have the authority to do more. I urge your support of these two bills. Thank you for your time.

¹ Oliveira, Peg, *The Child Care Subsidy Program Policy and Practice: Connecticut Child Care Providers Identify the Problems*, CT Voices for Children, April 2006.