



END HUNGER CONNECTICUT! Inc.

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Testimony in Favor of S.B. 1275: An Act Concerning Adequate
Staffing at the Department of Social Services
Human Services Committee
March 6, 2007

Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Sally Mancini and I am the Assistant Director for End Hunger Connecticut! Inc (EHC!). One of the main goals of EHC! is to decrease the levels of hunger, food insecurity and poor nutrition in our state. We represent over 1,000 members, many of which are the community food sites which are the first responders to food emergencies in people's lives. End Hunger Connecticut! is supportive of S.B. 1275: An Act Concerning Adequate Staffing at the Department of Social Services (DSS) because along with our members, state DSS workers serve on the front lines, defending against hunger in the state through effective administration of the Food Stamp Program.

The basis for this testimony comes from End Hunger Connecticut!'s four Food Stamp Outreach Workers that service Hartford, New London, Tolland and Windham counties. Our outreach workers see the effect of less than adequate staff at DSS daily through the clients they help. Clients who are eligible for food stamps wait for an eligibility interview and have difficulty phoning DSS staff. Workers do not respond to calls and mail is lost and left unanswered. Depending on the DSS office, workers average between 800-1,000 cases. The bottom line is that the DSS front line staff is overworked and overburdened and people are not getting the services they are eligible for.

DSS continues to fall short on key indicators that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses to measure effective administration of the Food Stamp Program. DSS's timeliness in processing food stamp applications is around 80%, much lower than the national average of 90-95%. This makes the position of Food Stamp Outreach Worker particularly difficult as we have the job of selling the Food Stamp Program in the community. Around 40% of people eligible for food stamps are currently not receiving. Many turn down the benefit because of the hassle of working through the application process at DSS.

I would like to share a story with you that highlights the effect of inadequate staffing levels at DSS. Last spring a woman came to our office looking for assistance with food stamps. She had tried to apply on her own but became frustrated in the process when asked to produce a specific document pertaining to eligibility. We worked with her for several months and finally in November she received food stamps. Not only did she receive food stamps for the month of November but she received \$2,000 in retroactive food stamps since she was eligible for food stamps all along. It turns out that the document DSS wanted from her, which she could not track down, was easily verified through an alternate method. This woman needed personal attention, the kind of attention that DSS workers with 800-1,000 cases apiece cannot give.

I hope that I have shed light on the problems that End Hunger Connecticut! encounters within the current DSS staffing levels. Clients who come to End Hunger Connecticut! for help are at an advantage because we have the contacts to talk to supervisors and get clients their benefits. But what about all those who don't come to us? They likely end up going without food, food that should be available to them.

You have the ability with this legislation to allow the Department of Social Services to hire 200 workers that are sorely needed. This is an issue that must be solved at the state level and EHC! urges you to please pass S.B. 1275.

Thank you.