



2139 Silas Deane Highway
Suite 205
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
(860) 257-8066 • (860) 257-8074 FAX

Jo Nol, Ph.D., LCSW, ACSW, President
Stephen A. Karp, MSW, Executive Director
naswct@conversent.net
www.naswct.org

Human Services Committee
Public Testimony
March 8, 2007

1361

Good afternoon Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Marcia Bok and I am testifying for the Connecticut chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. I am also a member of the TANF Council and the Welfare Working Group. I would like to address some issues regarding the Temporary Family Assistance program that I think will be helpful to welfare recipients. These are issues that I believe advocates for low-income families have been concerned about for some time. We believe that it is time to move from a caseload reduction strategy to an anti-poverty, self-sufficiency strategy which will be truly helpful to low-income families.

First, I want to briefly note that welfare is not a topic that receives much attention in the legislature and elsewhere. Since welfare reform in 1996, the reduction in welfare caseloads has led many people to conclude that welfare reform has been a great success and that poverty among families is no longer a big concern. Unfortunately, that is not true. We know that many individuals who leave welfare, even if they are working, are not earning enough to support their families. And often employment is unstable, with few or no benefits (we note, for example, that 40 percent of Connecticut's workforce has no paid sick leave) and individuals may move from job to job, but rarely do they experience upward economic mobility. I want to thank the members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee for its interest in the issues of low-income families and for the recommendations it has provided based on the findings of the OLR study. Several of the issues that we support today are also recommendations in the PRI report.

One of the most important findings, and these findings are backed up by many other studies in other states, is that even if individuals are working when they leave welfare, they are often not working six months to a year later; and even when they are working, their wages are extremely low, benefits may not exist or be very meager, and working conditions are unstable and inadequate. Economic mobility is just about non-existent. With strict time limits and an emphasis on work first, individuals often leave welfare with wages below the federal poverty level and with few opportunities for education and training.

So today, I want to briefly mention several proposals that have been generated by the welfare working group, several of which are also supported by the PRI committee. First, we are asking for an income supplement of 12 months for individuals who are

working but remain poor. This work transition benefit would help families phase off welfare more gently and would also help DSS meet their federal work participation requirements. A very similar recommendation is also being proposed by PRI. This proposal acknowledges that helping individuals, who are working, with some additional cash assistance can make a major difference in helping that family climb out of poverty. A second proposal would allow individuals with disabilities to work a limited number of hours without losing their exempt status (i.e. exempt from time limits). We also support increasing jobs services for TFA recipients from \$6.5 million to \$8.8 million. We cannot stress enough the importance of education and training for individuals to obtain better jobs with better incomes. We also support assistance in moving eligible individuals, as efficiently as possible, from TFA to SSI (which would be helpful to clients and would save the state money), a COLA increase in TFA benefits, and opening the safety net to families who lose cash assistance due to time limits (and not only for those who are sanctioned off welfare). These last two proposals are similar to recommendations by PRI.

I believe these proposals take us to a new level in welfare reform. The proposals we are supporting today provide some additional cash assistance, some additional education and training, and additional safety net services. All of these supports can better help individuals and families become self-sufficient as they are beginning to improve their standard of living and well-being. I thank you for your attention to these important matters.