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**Testimony in Support of SB 1350,
AAC Administration of the State Administered General Assistance Program
March 8, 2007**

My name is Joanne Gibau and I am an attorney at New Haven Legal Assistance. I am here to speak in favor of Senate Bill No. 1350 and to ask you to amend the bill to correct a drafting error. SB 1350 will increase SAGA cash assistance to \$333/month across the board for the poorest of the poor - all single SAGA cash assistance recipients, ~~to an amount equal to the TFA payment level for one person. Today, there are SAGA recipients receiving only \$200/month and some receiving as little as \$50/month.~~

I want to bring to your attention a drafting error in Section 1 (b)(2) of SB 1350. Language and brackets should be inserted after (2) to read: **“three hundred thirty three dollars per month for a single transitional individual, [who is required to pay for shelter, and”** Failure to correct this error will unintentionally eliminate cash assistance for a category of transitionally eligible SAGA cash recipients. I have also attached this corrected language to my testimony.

Regarding the SAGA asset limit, the Bill’s statement of purpose proposes to increase the asset limit for the SAGA cash assistance program, but does not actually do it. The current asset limit for a single individual is only \$250. I ask you to increase the asset limit.

The cost of the SAGA cash assistance program is reduced by the retroactive federal reimbursement on any SAGA cash assistance benefit that is paid pending an SSI disability determination. As noted in the attached SAGA Fact sheet, in 2005, CT was reimbursed \$3,452,413 for its SAGA cash assistance expenditures.

Who are the faces of these SAGA recipients? One face is an Italian single woman in her 50’s with no children. She’s a survivor of domestic violence. She held several jobs throughout the years performing general office work. She even worked for a local welfare department as a temp. She never would have imagined applying for SAGA cash assistance for herself, but one day after caring for her father for 7 years until his death, working for years, running out of unemployment compensation benefits and savings, she applied for SAGA cash assistance. She could no longer work due to her multiple psychiatric and medical conditions, including depression, anxiety and emphysema. She was lucky enough to own a condo, but she couldn’t afford to even meet her basic needs let alone pay her relatively low mortgage with SAGA cash assistance. She lost her home. She was eventually granted Social Security Disability two years after her application. Although she is now receiving Social Security Disability benefits, she urges

you to increase SAGA cash assistance for those individuals who still need SAGA cash assistance.

Another face is of an African-American woman in her 40's and mother of one adult daughter. She has multiple psychiatric and medical conditions including severe depression, chronic congestive heart failure and hypertension. In the past, she worked for the U.S. Post office, Anthem BCBS and as a teacher's assistant working with children with special needs. Eventually, when her health deteriorated, she was forced to apply for TFA cash assistance, but when her daughter graduated from high school, she was discontinued from TFA cash assistance and forced to apply for SAGA cash assistance pending a decision regarding her eligibility for Social Security Disability. She was evicted from her apartment because her SAGA cash assistance was not enough to pay her rent with SAGA cash assistance.

~~You have the face of a Latina woman, in her early 20's, a survivor of physical and sexual abuse as a child. She voluntarily gave custody of her only daughter to a caring relative because she knew she could not take care of her daughter. She has a history of multiple suicide attempts beginning in her childhood and inpatient hospitalization for her psychiatric impairment. She has a dual diagnosis of a psychiatric impairment and substance abuse. The SAGA cash assistance payment amount is insufficient for her to afford a safe, stable place to live.~~

Finally, there's the face of a former graduate student and teaching assistant in her 50's, who cared for her mother for many years until her death despite her own multiple disabilities including diabetes, kidney disease, severe major depression and suicide attempts. She ended up in a shelter shortly after the death of her mother. She was later granted SSI disability benefits.

On behalf of financially needy single individuals, I urge you to amend Raised Bill No. 1350 and increase the SAGA cash assistance benefit amount to at least \$333/month across the board for all SAGA cash assistance recipients. I also ask you to increase the asset limit for SAGA cash assistance.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Amended Language for SB 1350

**AN ACT CONCERNING ADMINISTRATION OF THE STATE-ADMINISTERED
GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Subsection (b) of section 17b-191 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2007*):

(b) [No earlier than September 1, 2003, but not later than October 1, 2003, the] The state-administered general assistance program [pursuant to this section and any general assistance program operated by a town] shall provide cash assistance of [(1) two hundred] three hundred thirty-three dollars per month to (1) a single unemployable person upon determination of such person's unemployability; [(2) two hundred dollars per month for] and (2) three hundred and thirty-three dollars per month for a single transitional individual, [who is required to pay for shelter; and (3) fifty dollars per month for a single transitional individual who is not required to pay for shelter. No earlier than September 1, 2003, but not later than October 1, 2003, eligible families] Families eligible for cash assistance shall receive [cash] such assistance in an amount that is [fifty dollars less than] equal to the standard of assistance such family would receive under the temporary family assistance program. [The standard of assistance paid for individuals residing in rated boarding facilities, shall remain at the level in effect on August 31, 2003.] No individual shall be eligible for cash assistance under the program if eligible for cash assistance under any other state or federal cash assistance program.

FACTS about **The SAGA Cash Program**

The State Administered General Assistance Program (SAGA) is CT's program for assisting those who are destitute (having no more than \$250 in assets) and unemployable or disabled.

Eligible SAGA recipients receive between \$200 and \$50 a month in cash assistance. Unemployable or transitional recipients with housing expenses receive \$200 while transitional recipients without housing costs are only able to receive \$50 a month.

Unemployable SAGA clients are between the ages of 16 and 65 who ~~have a medically documented physical or mental condition expected to last at least 6 months, that prevents them from working.~~

Transitional SAGA recipients have a recent connection to the workforce but are prevented from working because of a physical or mental condition expected to last less than 6 months.

As of October 2006 (the most recent data available at the time of this writing) DSS reports that there are 4148 CT residents receiving SAGA cash assistance.

2168 of these individuals are women, 1980 are men,
2814 are deemed to be unemployable and 1326 are transitional.

The majority of those deemed unemployable have disability applications pending with the federal Social Security Administration (SSA) and are waiting for a decision on their SSDI and/or SSI eligibility. This process can take up to two years before a final decision is issued. Pending such a decision, these clients have access to no other assistance besides SAGA.

CT does receive retroactive federal reimbursement on any SAGA cash benefit that is paid out pending an SSDI/SSI determination.

The total cost of the SAGA Cash Program is approximately \$10 million. CT receives federal reimbursement for half of the cost of those clients who become eligible for SSI. In 2005 the state was reimbursed \$3,452,413 for their SAGA cash expenditures.