

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

My name is Rose Esposito. I have been an Elderly Outreach Counselor at the Town of Hamden Elderly Services Department for 17 years.

The intake process of the Low Income Heating Energy Assistance Program as pertains to my duties is to interview, process the application by verifying income, residence and assets. From that point the completed application is submitted to Community Action Agency for approval. We're told by CAA that approval can take up to 45 days unless the application is marked as an emergency. Emergencies are faxed to the supervisor at CAA for immediate processing.

CAA's follow-up and expediency leaves much to be desired. There is no accountability for technicians telling our clients, that "your application is not here, it has not been sent down yet, it has not been processed as yet, we'll have to call you back (which they don't do) or as happened last year more than this year, files have been lost. This year I have had to intervene on various occasions by contacting supervisors directly when clients' attempts to get authorizations for deliveries have gone unanswered or unresolved.

I think if CAA is to maintain the program at their facility then attitudes have to be adjusted and supervisors need to train their associates better and monitor their day-to-day activities to see that the integrity of the program is maintained. We do the complete application process for the Renters Rebate of Elderly Renters and Totalling Disabled Persons program including completing the applications and determining eligibility. Doing this same application process for the energy program not only will streamline the process, but fits nicely into the duties that we already perform, thus completing and certifying the application which would improve the overall program. Our interest is to better serve our clients and this can be accomplished if the State gives us that authority.

I think by directly submitting the applications to DSS electronically would work, but I don't think submitting them by mail would be expeditious. With the present system there are too many persons touching applications which lends itself to the potential of mishandling, where a better way to process would be to send the information via computer to Hartford. This would result in better efficiency of the program, serving our clients in a more expeditious manner and would save the State money as well.

Therefore, I urge your support of the pilot program in the New Haven Region, Bill 7232, for the administration of low income energy assistance by the municipalities.

Thank you.

*Rose Esposito*