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Testimony Supporting:

S.B. No. 1361, An Act Concerning Administration of the Temporary Family Assistance Program
S.B. No. 1360, An Act Concerning the Availability of Optional Services under the Medicaid Program

H.B. 7233, An Act Concerning Health Care Access for Children with Special Health Care Needs

Sharon D. Langer, J.D.
Mary A. Glassman, J.D.

Human Services Committee Public Hearing

March 7, 2007

Dear Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and Members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee:

Sharon Langer is a Senior Policy Fellow, and Mary Glassman is Director of Legislative Affairs with Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well being of Connecticut's children, youth and families. We submit this written testimony on behalf of the sister lobbying organization – Advocates for Connecticut's Children and Youth (ACCY), a statewide, independent, citizen-based organization dedicated to speaking up for children, youth and families.

We strongly support, S.B. No. 1361, An Act Concerning Administration of the Temporary Family Assistance Program, S.B. No. 1360, An Act Concerning the Availability of Optional Services under the Medicaid Program, H.B. 7233, An Act Concerning Health Care Access for Children with Special Health Care Needs.

S.B. 1361 – AAC Administration of the Temporary Family Assistance Program

We commend the Committee for recognizing the need to improve the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program, which serves our poorest children and families. Now that we have crossed the 10-year threshold of our “welfare reform” program, it is well past time that the monthly benefits are increased and adjustments are made to help our most vulnerable families keep a roof over their heads and obtain the promise of economic well-being through needed temporary income, child care, and other critical supports.

Specifically, we support the following provisions:

- Raising the monthly cash benefit by 10%. The benefit amount has not been increased since 1991. While the amount of the proposed increase is far less than needed to make up for inflation during the past 16 years, it is a good first step in recognizing that families need additional income to pay basic subsistence costs, such as rent, utilities, and food.
- Enactment of a work transition benefit that permits working families who would otherwise lose cash benefits due to earnings, to receive a reduced cash benefit for up to twelve months. This initiative smoothes out the “cliff” that very poor working families face when their countable income goes over the TFA eligibility limits.
- Exempting from the TFA time-limit families whose wage earner has a disability that prevents him or her from working at least 35 hours per week. This provision would also ensure that such families are given appropriate accommodations so they may participate in employment and training activities.
- Opening up the Safety Net program to families who have used up their time-limited benefits but are still very poor (income under the payment standard). Currently, only families who have run afoul of employment services rules, i.e., sanctioned, are eligible for Safety Net services, such as, case management services to assist families in obtaining employment, and in-kind or vendor benefits to prevent homelessness.

S.B. Bill 1360, AAC the Availability of Optional Services under the Medicaid Program

We **support** this restoration of a whole host of preventive and/or cost-effective services for parents, and other adults served by the Medicaid program, including podiatry services. Eliminating these services has been penny wise and pound foolish, resulting in Medicaid recipients forced to seek more expensive care.

H.B. Bill 7233, AAC Health Care Access for Children with Special Health Care Needs

We **support** changing the reference from HUSKY Plan A to “Medicaid” to make clear that children with complex special health care needs served by the “Katie Beckett” waiver program are eligible for critical therapeutic services rendered by home health agencies, within or outside of the home environment. It is our understanding that the original legislation passed last year was intended to help these “Katie Beckett” children - not to exclude them - as the current wording of the statute appears to do. This is a small but important legislative correction.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of these three bills related to the Temporary Family Assistance, and Medicaid programs.