

Representative Villano, Senator Harris, Honorable Members of the Committee. My name is Jennifer D. Barahona and I am the Director of the Center for Youth Development at Family & Children's Agency [FCA], in Norwalk. **I am submitting this testimony in support of a State Earned Income Tax Credit, S.B. 146.**

FCA is one of the largest non-profit social service agencies in Fairfield County, serving the Greater Norwalk area as well as many other parts of Connecticut through our various services. The mission of our agency is to partner with individuals, families, organizations and communities to successfully meet life's challenges and opportunities. We do this through a range of services including Adoption, Counseling, Homeless Services, Family Support, Foster Care, Lifeline, Services for Seniors, Substance Abuse Treatment and Youth Development.

Despite the wide range in services we provide there is one unmistakable common thread throughout the vast majority of our clients and that is the difficulty they have making ends meet. The parents of the children we serve in the Center for Youth Development are predominately low-income working mothers & fathers. Although most of our services are no-cost, we do charge a nominal fee for our After School Program. We have several working parents who struggle to pay our \$30 monthly fee because money is stretched so tight in the home. We have heard heart breaking stories from families who have to make impossible decisions about which bills they will pay. Often when we call parents to give reports on how their child is doing, the phone has been cut off. They tell us that in order to keep their heat and electricity on, something else had to give. These are working families.

Last winter one of our mentors approached us with a concern about the seven year old boy he was mentoring. The child often complained of pain in his mouth and had great difficulty eating. When the mentor approached the mother, who works at a

local day care center, she said she knew there was a problem with the boy's teeth but with no dental insurance she did not have enough money to take him to see a dentist. When staff did some research they found that the local dental clinic for children had been closed. Eventually they located an adult clinic where they had to plead with them to agree to see the child.

The parents that we work with are clearly struggling but what is even more heart breaking to see is that the kids in our programs are discouraged. They see their own parents working hard but that they are still not able to get by. We encourage them to do well in school but they don't see what the point is. We have to help make work pay for families and start breaking the cycle of poverty. An Earned Income Tax Credit would help reinforce the notion that working can pay and would provide good role modeling for these young people.

Since 2000, Connecticut's house costs have risen 64% while wages have only increased a little over 18%. Working families are having tremendous difficulty meeting their most basic needs, let alone other needs that are healthy for the family and the community. I took a phone call recently from a long time client who was in tears because the baseball league her son had played on for years had raised their fees and she could no longer afford for him to play. This is a child who lives in an area with tremendous pressures to become involved in negative behaviors, especially gang violence. For him to not be able to participate in a game that he loves and in an activity that keeps him off the streets because his mother who works three jobs cannot pay the registration fee is something that we should feel shameful about. With rising health care, housing, utility, and education costs working poor families need every advantage that they can get. **This is the year that we must pass a State Earned Income Tax Credit; our families cannot afford to wait any longer.**

Thank you.
