

CAHS

Connecticut Association for Human Services
110 Bartholomew Avenue
Suite 4030
Hartford, CT 06106-2201
www.cahs.org

Robert A. Solomon, President
James P. Horan, Executive Director
860.951.2212
860.951.6511 fax

**Testimony of Tracy Helin, Outreach Director,
Connecticut Association for Human Services,
In Support of R.B. 1156,
Submitted to the Human Services Committee
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My name is Tracy Helin. I am the Outreach Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS concentrates on improving overall family economic security in the state. This testimony is submitted in support of Raised Bill Number 1156, An Act Aligning the Food Stamp Program Motor Vehicle Rule with the Care4Kids Motor Vehicle Rule. The federally-funded Food Stamp Program plays a critical role in ensuring that the nutritional needs of the nation's lower-income households are met. For households that are struggling to make ends meet, food stamps play an important role in meeting basic needs and supporting working families. There are currently over 210,000 Connecticut residents receiving food stamps.

An August 2005 report by Mathematica Policy Research, prepared for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), *State Food Stamp Participation Rates for the Working Poor in 2002*, noted that, only 43% of eligible working households in Connecticut participate in the Food Stamp Program. This is compared to an overall participation rate of 58%. This report also indicates that between 2000 and 2002, the years noted in the Mathematica report, Connecticut saw a 5% decline in the working poor participation rate.

A more recent October 2006 report by USDA, *Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2004*, indicates that Connecticut's 45% participation rate for working households ranks the state as 41st in the nation in this category. Perhaps not surprisingly, the states that have higher percentages of working Food Stamp Program participants, also have higher overall participation rates. For example, the top three ranking states, Tennessee, Missouri, and Oregon have working poor participation rates of 78%, 76%, and 75%, respectively. The same states also enjoy overall participation rates of 83%, 84%, and 83%, respectively. Obviously, this data suggests that Connecticut lags well behind the top performing states in the number of eligible working poor families who participate in food stamps, leaving millions of federal dollars unclaimed every year.

RB 1156 would do several things to help expedite the food stamp application process for eligible households. Most importantly, elimination of a motor vehicle as a part of the Food Stamp Program's asset test would increase the number of eligible households, as fewer disqualifications would take place based on motor vehicle value. Secondly, the burdensome process of determining the value of a vehicle would be completely removed from the food stamp application process, easing the process for both applicants, and Department of Social Services

intake workers. Thirdly, the confusing public perception regarding the allowable value of a vehicle for food stamp applicants would be eliminated.

Given Connecticut's limited public transportation system, combined with the current cap on motor vehicle value, access to the Food Stamp Program is severely restricted for many working households who rely on dependable cars to get to work. Streamlining the application process for working households will improve access, increase the number of working households on the program, and potentially raise the state's overall food stamp participation rate. This rule change can be accomplished with little or no cost to the state, and has the potential to add to the \$200 million in federal benefits that the Food Stamp Program already brings in to Connecticut each year.

Passage of Raised Bill Number 1156 will provide a much-needed improvement in food stamp access for all eligible Connecticut households. CAHS urges you to pass this bill, and remove the burdensome process of providing motor vehicle documentation from this program.