

Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 688

WIC: A PRENATAL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT PROFILE

Chairman Handley, Senators, Representatives and members of the audience. My name is Sofia Segura-Perez and I am speaking as a representative of the Hispanic Health Council, in support of Senate Bill 688, WIC: A PRENATAL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTMENT PROFILE

The Hispanic Health Council is a community based organization located in Hartford whose mission is to improve the health and well-being of Latinos and other underserved communities through research, service and advocacy. The Council has a 29-year track record of developing, delivering, evaluating and replicating model programs designed to address health disparities experienced by low-income communities. During these 20 years, the Women Infants and Children Program (WIC) has been a steadfast partner, in the following ways:

WIC has been a critically needed resource for increasing availability of nutrient-dense foods during pregnancy, lactation, infancy and early childhood, critical stages of the life cycle, for thousands of very low-income clients that we have served over the decades, and of nutrition education.

WIC has been a partner in facilitating the work of other HHC Programs. We regularly conduct food stamp outreach in WIC offices, partner in the delivery of breastfeeding education and support to WIC clients, among other things.

The WIC Program serves over 51,000 participants in Connecticut. The benefits of the Program have been well documented. WIC participation has been strongly associated with improved cognitive development, school readiness and immunization rates among children. A 2004 study concluded that WIC participation prevents overweight in young children. The WIC Program reduces the need for extensive medical care, and is therefore a cost saver for the Medicaid Program.

While WIC provides numerous benefits to Connecticut's population and economy, the program has been weakened during recent years due to the fact that federal funding has not kept up with the real costs of the program. WIC is adequately funded to pay for the food provided by the program, but over the past six years has fallen short by \$1.7 million dollars needed to pay for the staff needed to adequately serve clients, and to effectively offer the nutrition education that is the cornerstone of the program. The effect of this shortfall has been:

- Delays in enrollment of participants in great need of the program
- Inadequate outreach and referrals, thus compromising the program's ability to reach those most in need of the program, and to link them to other critically needed services
- In short, thousands of people eligible for WIC in Connecticut are not being served

WIC is a flagship program of CT's public health system. As a nutritionist and dietitian who works with low income clients on a daily basis, I feel that a program as important and as effective as WIC must be fortified to provide services at the needed level and with the quality that its participants deserve. An investment in WIC by the state of Connecticut is a commitment to our future. Let's keep WIC working so that all children get a healthy start in life. Please support Senate Bill 688. Thank you