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TESTIMONY

of the

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

Submitted to the

Human Services Committee

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Marilyn Ondrasik

Executive Director

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Committee Chairmen and Committee members, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to you today.

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, BCAC, is a coalition of 82 member organizations. Our members represent a broad range of agencies including community centers, counseling organizations, early childhood programs, health centers, hospitals, churches and synagogues, and parent and civic organizations. Through a program combining research, community planning, advocacy, community education and mobilization, we work to ensure that children grow up healthy and safe and receive the education and skills to reach their full potential.

On behalf of our member organizations, we urge you to support **a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to help low-income families become self-sufficient.**

The EITC is a common-sense way to reduce poverty, reward work, and stimulate the economy. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, the federal EITC reduces poverty more than any other government program. This finding echoes the words of President Reagan who called the EITC “the best anti-poverty, the best pro-family, the best job creation measure to come out of Congress.” Recently, a panel of outside experts commissioned by Connecticut’s Child Poverty and Prevention Council recommended implementation of a state EITC to help meet the state’s goal of reducing childhood poverty in Connecticut, while also rewarding work.

In addition, with the signs of national recession looming, lawmakers must consider economic stimulus measures. The EITC puts dollars into the hands of families who will spend them quickly on basic items such as food, clothing, utilities and housing bills, credit card debt, and transportation. These dollars can help to stimulate the economy and avoid a recession.

According to 2005 census data for Connecticut, 8.3% of all residents in the state live in poverty. The poverty rate is much higher in some of our more distressed municipalities, such as Bridgeport, where 18% of residents live in poverty. A state EITC would significantly help these families who struggle to meet their everyday needs.

Many Americans experience poverty at least at one point over the course of their lives. Research from the Panel Study for Income Dynamics (PSID), an ongoing study that has followed the same individuals and households each year since 1968, has shown that the majority of Americans, or 58.5%, experience at least one year living in poverty by age 75. For White Americans, 54%, and for Black Americans 91%, will experience at least one year living in poverty by age 75.

We know that the EITC does not solely target individuals in poverty, but helps working families earning above the poverty threshold. If we look at people earning below one and half times the poverty level, almost half (47%) of all Americans will have already experienced at least one year where they earned below this amount by age 35. Put differently, 47% of Americans under age 35 experience at least one year in which they face serious challenges in meeting their basic needs.

This is even more significant because these are the years when the average person goes to school, attends college, begins to raise children and rents or purchases their first home. Struggling to be self sufficient during these years can have a long term impact for families and children. A state EITC would strengthen the safety-net for low-income families and ensure that when a family's basic needs are threatened, it is a temporary experience only, and that it does not set families on a negative trajectory with far-reaching consequences.

A state EITC would benefit families earning up to \$40,000. According to census data for 2005, **approximately 40% of Bridgeport's families** earn below \$40,000 and nearly 20% of Connecticut families earn below the same amount. Depending upon income, working families could receive up to the federal maximum credit of \$4,716 and a state credit of \$943. A state EITC credit would give Connecticut's working families more cash to pay off debt, pay rising housing and heating costs, finance transportation to work, invest in education, buy basic necessities, pay for health care, or save to build assets.

This is the year to put Connecticut on the list of 22 states which have already passed an EITC. We strongly urge your support.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.