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**Testimony of Tracy Helin, Outreach Director,
Connecticut Association for Human Services,
In Support of S.B. 660,
Submitted to the Human Services Committee
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My name is Tracy Helin, Outreach Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS concentrates on improving overall family economic security and ending poverty in the state.

This testimony is submitted in support of S.B. 660, **An Act Concerning Establishment of a Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSE&T) Program and Fund**. 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, this program presents an opportunity to help food stamp recipients gain the skills needed to succeed in the labor market.

Connecticut currently operates a mandatory FSE&T program to serve the Able Bodied Adults Without Dependent population through a federal formula grant. S.B. 660 will improve upon that by creating an account and identifying funds to take advantage of an optional 50/50 match program offered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The funds that would be used as a match cannot already be matching other federal funds. As of 2005, 30 other states conduct some form of 50/50 match programs under the FSE&T program.

Here is why this program is attractive:

- The USDA program provides dollar-for-dollar matching funds for non-federal workforce development dollars that are spent on food stamp participants.
- The match funding is uncapped.
- Non-federal matching funds can come from the state budget, foundation grants, employer contributions and tuition payments.
- This program can be used to enhance TANF funding or in place of TANF funding and freeing TANF funds for other uses.
- The matched dollars could be aligned with the policy priorities of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council, including adult literacy, employment services, case management, post-secondary education, housing and child care.

This bill will greatly enhance the services and activities that are offered through FSE&T. A state supplemental program will help to improve the state's stagnant participation rate among lower-income working households. The services and training that will potentially be offered by the new 50/50 program

are sure to make food stamps more attractive to eligible households with work-related income, and will offer more opportunities to reach self-sufficiency.

Even better, the Farm Bill of 2002 expanded the attractiveness of FSE&T matching funds by removing the cap on reimbursement funds – there is no limit placed on the amount matching funds from USDA. Needless to say, increasing the opportunities to maximize federal dollars entering the state presents a benefit for all parties involved. Most importantly, matching funds will allow the state to provide innovative new services to food stamp recipients.

CAHS strongly urges passage of S.B. 660 and the establishment of a state Food Stamp Employment and Training Fund. Connecticut's future workforce and economy will greatly benefit.