

3/7/08 PJD
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My name is Carol Riccio-Greenberg, I am an Elderly Outreach Counselor for the Town of Hamden. As an Outreach Counselor, our jobs cover a myriad of duties that help our elderly clients.

During the winter months we assist the Community Action Agency of New Haven by doing the Energy Assistance Program we schedule and do the initial intake of the Energy Assistance applications for Community Action Agency (CAA) in New Haven. Completing our portion of the applications entails completing redundant paperwork and compiling documentation of the clients monthly income and their bank accounts.

During that same appointment , we as outreach counselors also screen for other programs the client might be eligible for.

Our applications have sat for the Energy Assistance Program sit in a bin and waited for a runner from CAA to pick up the files. Community Action practice up until recently was to pick up applications at our office twice a week. Since the "pending investigation, we have had no problem with the pick up schedule. As in years past, the files sat in our office for up to a week.

Once the files leave our office CAA is supposed to "certify" the application, and notify the client in writing of their eligibility/ineligibility. A good many of our clients will tell you that they never receive their award letter in the mail. Our office is ready willing and CAPABLE of

certifying the energy assistance applications for our client thus making it a one stop program. We hope that the HB 5616 will pass and that that by instituting a "pilot program" and allowing the the Towns to take over the program from start to finish it will streamline a program that has been moving in reverse. We also feel that HB 5799 a bill that that would add members from each Town's Social Services Program to CAA's board of directors is an idea that is LONG OVERDUE. Each Town should have a voice and an ear for their citizens when the long-standing problems with this agency arise each year.

With HB 5616 and and the enhancement of HB 5799 of adding members from Hamden, North Haven, West Haven, East Haven, I foresee savings that can be put back directly towards client needs in a program that has been cut dramatically over the years.

I have been completing Energy Assistance Applications for Hamden residents over 20 years. Each year when you think it can't get any worse it does. For instance, for the second consecutive year, . We had oil heating clients waiting for 2 months to receive approval. Although they (CAA) does have 45 days to process an application, this is not a reasonable time frame. Last year, after much frustration our clients started calling the Governors Office, DSS, TV stations, etc. and then and only then were there heating needs met.

We have found that when the media sheds a light on CAA or clients call their legislators, then and only then the Community Action will improve slightly , but inevitably the next program year CAA will revert back to their old ways. Our office works with the population aged 60 and above. One of the requirements put in within the last 10 years is that a client must get an authorization for oil when they are at a quarter of a tank. Most of our seniors do not go up and down their basement stairs and must guess when they are at quarter of a tank.

When calling CAA, they are met with a phone system (although it has improved since last year) is not user friendly. A good deal of our clients give up when they can't get anyone to answer a phone call to request an oil delivery. We (in our office) have waited on hold for up to one hour at times. Our clients give up and they contact us to call for them. If and when a client gets through the phone system, many times they are hung up on or given mis-information. At this time of year when clients have exhausted their “basic benefit” and are looking for a “safety net”, clients have been left waiting for oil for up to 2 weeks or are told, call your oil dealer after 4:00, they will have authorization. Many clients have called to say that they were told to call after 4:00 and now its 3 days later and they still don't have the oil. (Turns out, they never were authorized). If clients are told not to call unless they are at a quarter of a tank, in cold weather a quarter of a

tank will not wait for CAA to decide whether they want to process my clients application. Utility heating applications sit untouched for months at a time thus increasing the chance of losing documentation or even the whole file, as has happen in the past. Award letters that are supposedly mailed out,never appear. Letters to clients saying that their file is incomplete and they need different items, never seem to get to the client, resulting in the client having to come back to the office and re-apply. (I say in jest, maybe we should investigate the post office, because all those letters never arrive)

I urge you to come to Hamden – speak to our clients – don't take our word for it. Many would be here if the logistics were different. I urge you to go to the surrounding communities and speak with the agencies that do the same work as we do. You will find that it is the same throughout our area. I urge those of you who administer the funds to come and speak with those of us who have direct client contact and we will help you streamline a program fraught with unnecessary paperwork and unnecessary time delays. This program as Dr Phil says “Needs a Hero”.....and the hero would be you. By implementing the changes to this program that are so desperately needed, and not turning a blind eye to the gross mis-management of this agencies federal and state funds. If it was your mother, father, grandparents, aunts or uncles dealing with this agency, I'm sure you would see things that way we do. No one who is eligible for the

program should have to wait to get heat. If you continue to let this agency administer these programs in the manner that has existed for so long – SHAME ON YOU. How many federal and state investigations , how many people have to be arrested, how many Directors have to be replaced, does it take for the State of Connecticut to say, **NO – THIS CAN NOT CONTINUE.**

I urge you, on behalf of my clients to support HB 5799 and also HB 5616.