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**Testimony of Tracy Helin, Outreach Director,
Connecticut Association for Human Services,
In Support of S.B. 574,
Submitted to the Committee on Public Health
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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 and ending poverty in the state. This testimony is submitted in support of SB Number 574, AN ACT CONCERNING THE FEDERAL SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC). The federally-funded Child Nutrition Programs play a critical role in ensuring that the nutritional needs of the nation's lower- and moderate-income households are met. For households that are struggling to make ends meet, these programs play an important role in meeting basic needs and supporting working families. There are currently over 50,000 Connecticut women, infants, and children whose nutritional needs are being supplemented by the WIC program. Ensuring and improving access to it is a significant measure for the state as a whole.

A July 2007 report by the Food Research and Action Center, *State of the States, 2007: A Profile of Food and Nutrition Programs Across the Nation*, noted that Connecticut's WIC participation rate has dropped by over 17% during the past ten years. Section 1 of SB 574 includes the measure of appropriating \$500,000 to establish a state funded WIC program to supplement the federal funding for the program. Recent uncertainties in federal allocations have caused the Department of Public Health to consolidate WIC districts, resulting in less access for many communities. A state supplemental program will help to improve access, and reverse the downward trend in participation.

Needless to say, the high protein, nutritious foods that the WIC program provides to pregnant or breastfeeding mothers, their infant children, and children up to age 5, is essential to help ensure a healthy start to growing children. The relatively small amount of funding that is proposed will save the state countless millions of dollars in future health-related costs.

Further, Section 2 of this Bill will begin the process of linking Department of Social Services clients to this Department of Public Health Program. Given that the Medicaid, HUSKY, Energy Assistance and Food Stamp Programs all have income-based eligibility guidelines similar to those of WIC, it only makes sense that eligible clients should be referred from one agency to another. This will surely be a positive step in increasing WIC participation among eligible households, maximizing federal resources that come into Connecticut via nutrition programs.

Passage of SB 574 will provide a much-needed improvement in WIC Program access for all eligible Connecticut households. CAHS urges you to pass this bill so that our state's future – our children – will be given a healthy start during their formative years.