



Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.
Testimony before Human Service Committee
March 11, 2008
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Greater Hartford Legal Aid

HB 5907 H. B. No. 5907 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE TEMPORARY FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SUPPORT

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid. I have represented low income Hartford area residents primarily in public benefits issues for many years. I am here to speak in support of H.B. 5907, an initiative of the Welfare Working Group. The group is a coalition of about 25 groups that have been working together since 1996 to help ensure support for low-income families with children in the state. The bill makes several changes to the Temporary Family Assistance program that will assist transitioning workers, and those struggling to make the transition.

Section one- Ease the cliffs for families moving from welfare to work. Families that receive TFA lose eligibility at the end of an extension when their income exceeds their grant. Working just over twenty hours per week at minimum wage can put a family of three over this limit. These families experience a sudden income drop when TFA ends, often below an amount needed for rent and food. Both The Child Poverty and Prevention Council and last year's Legislative Program and Investigation Committee's report on the TFA program recommended an income supplement for working families to address this "cliff." This proposal would continue a work supplement for such families in the amount of two thirds of the TFA grant for the first six months and one third of the grant for the second six months. A number of states have adopted these "post-employment" programs to assist families as they make the transition to work. Such programs have the additional benefit of boosting the state's work participation rate to meet federal TANF requirements.

Section two, Exempt from time limits people with disabilities who are working as much as they are able and add homelessness or risk of homelessness as an enumerated barrier to employment and increases child support pass through

Currently, a family led by an adult who is "incapacitated" is not subject to time limits or work requirements on the TFA program. But the definition of incapacity is very strict. If a parent with a disability works even one hour, the family will be subject to time limits and work requirements. While these families are eligible for extensions, they must apply for extensions every six months and will lose benefits after five years. The proposal exempts people with disabilities who are working to the extent of their ability from time limits only.

This section also specifies that homelessness or risk of homelessness counts as a barrier to work for purposes of getting an extension to the TFA program. After a family has received two six-month extensions of cash assistance, further extensions are granted only if there are barriers to employment. Currently, the statute requires that the adult in the family demonstrate "two or more ... barriers to employment including, but not limited to, the lack of available child care, substance abuse or addiction, severe mental or physical health problems, one or more severe learning disabilities, domestic violence or a child who has a serious physical or behavioral health problem". Like these other factors, facing homelessness severely impacts a parent's ability to work. Moreover, TFA



eligibility at this critical juncture can be crucial for preserving housing, saving expenditures down the road if a family avoids becoming homeless.

Finally, this section of the bill would also increase the "child support pass-through" From \$50 to \$100 per month for one child and to \$150 when there are two or more children. The pass-through is an amount that the State, when it collects child support for a family who receives TFA, sends directly to the family, without reducing the TFA grant. (The rest of the child support collected goes to the state to offset the TFA expenditure.) Connecticut has been sending families a \$50 pass through. A 2006 change in federal law now allows states to pass through \$100 per month (up to \$200 if there are two or more children) to families, without having to reimburse the federal government for the TANF expenditure, as they had to previously. This bill seeks to take fuller advantage of what federal law permits, by passing through \$100 per month for one child or \$150 per month when there are two or more children.

Section 3, increase grant by 30% for caretaker relatives

Finally this bill authorizes a 30% higher TFA grant for "caretaker relatives." I am assuming that the intended beneficiaries would be "non-parent" caretakers, as is also proposed several other bills now pending. (S.B 7, S.B. 66, H.B. 5102, H.B. 5488) This proposal helps address a disparity in the payment structure between the present system of family and foster care. A child placed in the custody of the Department of Children and families now receives more than twice the amount the same child would receive as a member of a TFA unit with a relative. This proposal would help address that disparity by increasing the amount that a caretaker relative would receive when taking on responsibility for the care of a family member who is not his or her child. It is healthier and less disruptive for children to be raised by family members, and it saves the state significant costs by keeping these children out of the foster care system. By addressing the financial disparity, this proposal helps promote this important policy.