



Appropriations, Human Services and Energy and Technology Committees Joint Public  
hearing on the  
**2008-2009 Low Income Energy Assistance Program Block Grant Allocation Plan**

August 21, 2008

Good Day, my name is Lucy Nolan and I am the Executive Director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger food security outreach, education and advocacy organization. I am here today to speak in favor of the Department of Social Services LIHEAP block grant allocation plan, specifically section X, Expanded Rental Assistance Benefits.

The Expanded Rental Assistance Benefits has the potential to significantly impact the amount of food stamp benefits that a household can receive. As you have heard from Commissioner Starkowski this plan would make those who are otherwise not eligible for the Standard Utility Allowance (or SUA) to become so. Since almost all food stamp beneficiaries are categorically eligible for LiHEAP it makes sense to use this option to increase their food stamp benefit during this time of need.

The SUA is used in place of actual utility costs to calculate a household's total shelter costs – higher shelter costs results in increased food stamp benefits. The SUA is based on average utility costs. In Connecticut the heating/cooling SUA is \$522 (DSS has requested an increase from the USDA for this winter to \$720). For example, a household of one person who would be eligible for only \$10 per month in food stamps could be eligible for \$108 a month using the SUA deduction and a family of four who earned \$400 a week and paid rent of \$400 a month would see an increase in their monthly food stamp benefit of \$260 from \$169. On average, households receiving the SUA deduction would now see approximately a 50% increase in their monthly food stamp benefit amount. This is a very significant increase.

With DSS's plan, a \$1.00 payment would go to households that are not otherwise eligible for SUA, but eligible for LiHEAP, essentially every food stamp household in Connecticut. Those are households that have some kind of utility expense. To be clear, the \$1.00 would be a one time a year payment, and the increase in food stamp allocation is borne by the federal government, like all the food stamp benefits are. With the authorization to move forward with this plan Connecticut would be in alignment with other New England states and more specifically with Massachusetts and New York in

ensuring that our residents are receiving the maximum amount in food stamp benefits during this critical time.

DSS calculates that there are approximately 55,000 food stamp households who do not get the SUA, some are not eligible because they are homeless. Additionally, given the growth in our state caseload they are anticipating a growth of 500 new households a month. Connecticut has 8,000 more Food Stamp households this year than last, and given the economy that number will increase. Our outreach workers have been inundated by those requesting assistance with the program since the late spring. One of the beauties of the Expanded Rental Assistance Program, as proposed, is that it can and will decrease some of the time needed for intake by the workers – freeing up their time to work on more cases and decreasing quality control errors, both something desperately needed in Connecticut.

End Hunger Connecticut! has four food stamp outreach workers in the north and south eastern Connecticut and Hartford and Tolland Counties. We have seen the need for food stamps increase significantly. Additionally, we have seen the need for increased food from our food pantry members. August is always a critical time, but as the news has reported from the *beginning* of this summer the need has been greater this year. We anticipate that the need will be much greater as the weather turns colder, the need to heat is increased and the price of food increases.

I would like to add that EHC! supports the ongoing funding of the Human Services Infrastructure through the Community Action Agencies for both food stamp and LiHEAP outreach and eligibility status. Given the backlogs at DSS it is critical to ensure that Connecticut residents are afforded every possible opportunity to receive the benefits that they are entitled to.

The Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) reported that there is a direct correlation between the cost of heat and food insecurity in children. As energy expenditures increase, food expenditures decrease and as the economy stalls there is less money for a family to afford food. Food stamps are the cornerstone of the federal nutrition programs, helping to feed many of our neighbors – yet to be eligible for food stamps a household has to have very little income (135% of the federal poverty level or a *gross* income of \$2,238 per month for a household of four). The LiHEAP plan as presented before you can significantly add to a very low-income family's ability to afford food during these critical times. We urge your support.