



Testimony Before the Human Services Committee

H. B. No. 5616 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A MUNICIPAL PILOT PROJECT WITH RESPECT TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

H. B. No. 5619 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING REIMBURSEMENT RATES TO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS UNDER THE CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PROGRAM.

H. B. No. 5621 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO A HEARING IN THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND AN APPROPRIATION FOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE.

H.B. No. 5622 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF SHELTER SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF HOUSEHOLD ABUSE AND AN APPROPRIATION FOR LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAMS FOR INDIGENT PERSONS.

H. B. No. 5623 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY FOR EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES.

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Deputy Commissioner
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Testimony

Good morning, Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Claudette J. Beaulieu. I am Deputy Commissioner of Programs at the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS). I am here this morning to testify on several bills concerning the programs, services and operations of DSS.

H. B. No. 5616 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A MUNICIPAL PILOT PROJECT WITH RESPECT TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES ENERGY

The Department of Social Services opposes this bill. This proposal would start a pilot program in which New Haven area municipalities would operate the energy assistance program in Hamden, New Haven, East Haven, West Haven and North Haven .

As an alternative, I would like to talk about an existing model that we have been expanding across the state which has been highly successful. Seven of our twelve community action agencies use this model, and we would like to offer this for consideration for the New Haven area towns. In this model, community action agencies provide free access to the energy computer software system at off-site locations. This enables towns or non-profits the ability to accept energy applications, to enter them into the computer system, and to look up the status of an energy assistance application. The application is then reviewed at the community action agency, which makes the decision whether to grant or deny the application. The community action agency also authorizes fuel oil deliveries and payments to vendors, as well as prepares reports on program caseloads and expenditures.

In some sites, the community action agency provides the computer software and trains the staff in how to use it. In others, the community action agency places their own staff person at the town hall, senior center or other location to actually accept the application. In either situation, there is no charge to the town for access to the energy computer software nor for having a community action agency employee there. The municipalities and non-profits also have access to the previous year's applications and would only need to update the information for repeat clients.

The CAA's retain responsibility for certifying the applications, authorizing deliveries and payments, paying the vendors and preparing reports to the state on applications, commitments and expenditures. The status of applications, authorized deliveries and vendor payments can be checked on the computer if the municipality chooses to do so. If the certification and payment aspects of the program were to be given to the municipalities, this would expose those municipalities to liability if applications were incorrectly granted.

This alternative would in essence provide what the municipalities want (expeditious processing of applications, lessening the administrative burden) without the potential for

liability in the event assistance is incorrectly granted. In other words, it's the best of both worlds for the towns and nonprofits that participate.

Feedback from towns that have used this model has been extremely positive. Out of 148 sites that are not the community action agency main office, 56 have access to the energy computer software system this year. This has improved application processing time, provided better customer service, and has enabled towns or nonprofit sites to look up information on pending applications without having to call the community action agency, thus lessening the volume of phone calls coming into the community action agencies phone systems. This is a model which has already been tested and does not need to be piloted. It is a model that accomplishes what I believe this bill tries to do, which is to provide good customer service to low income households throughout the state who need energy assistance.

Furthermore, this bill if adopted would fragment the delivery of social services to New Haven area residents. When someone applies for energy assistance through a community action agency, they are also screened for a number of other programs that are offered through the CAA – this is what known as the Human Services Infrastructure. When someone applies for energy, that CAA worker may discover that the household needs help with Head Start, or employment and training, or maybe they need help with applying for the Earned Income Tax Credit. Perhaps they need help from the local fuel bank, a food pantry, or child care. Separating energy assistance out from this array of other services offered by the community action agency network would be a step backwards in service delivery for this population.

In closing, I would be happy to meet with the proponents of the bill to discuss this matter further and I believe that the model I have described would provide many of the advantages, without any of the disadvantages, of this proposed legislation.

H. B. No. 5619 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING REIMBURSEMENT RATES TO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS UNDER THE CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PROGRAM.

DSS is opposed to this bill as it mandates that the Care for Kids reimbursement rate be raised to the 75th percentile of the market rate survey. We have statutory authority to do this but are limited by the available appropriations. We have excerpted rationale provided in our current and approved federal child care plan that supports continuation of the current reimbursement rate structure.

Since January 1, 2002, Connecticut child care providers participating in the Care 4 Kids child care subsidy program have been reimbursed at payment levels established through a market rate survey that was conducted in April-May 2001. This survey was conducted by the University of Connecticut Center for Survey Research and Analysis (CSRA). DSS also contracted with CSRA to conduct the 2003, 2005 and the 2007 market rate surveys.

In the month prior to scheduled start of the 2007 survey, CSRA informed DSS of its decision to terminate the agreement.

State law requires state agencies to solicit competitive bids prior to purchasing services from a third party vendor. With no comparable vendors on the state's master contract list, the Lead Agency was not able to complete the bidding process in the time frame required for submission of the FFY 07-09 CCDF State Plan. As such, DSS decided to evaluate market rates using advertised rate information collected by the state's information and referral agency, 211-Child Care.

The 211-Child Care advertised rates are used in several states to establish market rates, including Connecticut prior to 2001. Since 2001, we have employed comparisons between the advertised rates to assess the validity of rates reported during the market surveys. Historically, the advertised rates are significantly lower than rates recorded through the market survey. We attribute this difference to the fact that it is to the provider's advantage to report higher rates since the market survey is used to set state reimbursements. This conclusion is born out by direct comparisons of the advertised rates to the reported survey rates for the same facility. In 2005, the advertised rates were 10 percent to 13 percent lower than the rates reported by the facility during the survey.

We assessed the viability of the current market rates to the rates reported to 211-Child Care in June of 2007. The advertised rates were derived from figures reported to 211-Child Care through telephone interview with each facility. 211-Child Care maintains a statewide database of the actual charges reported by all licensed providers in Connecticut by the type of setting and age group. Sampling is not involved. Surveys are conducted individually with all providers listed on the database. While some providers choose not to participate, the universe is nearly double the size of the sample pulled from prior market surveys.

We found that the 2007 advertised rates were 2.5 percent to 11% higher than the rates reported to 211-Child Care in 2005. Regional averages varied from minus 27 percent for school-age children to plus 16 percent for preschool children in the state's wealthiest region – Southwest. The analysis does not account for the ratable reductions given to families with multiple children enrolled in the same facility. Providers typically charge 10 percent less for the second child. State market rates are the same for all children, regardless of whether or not multiple children attend care at the same facility.

Based on this analysis, Connecticut recommended and was approved by the federal Administration for Children and Families to continue to use the 60th percentile market rates established from the 2001 market rate survey for the period effective October 1, 2007 to September 2009.

H. B. No. 5621 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO A HEARING IN THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND AN APPROPRIATION FOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE.

DSS is opposed to this bill because it is unnecessary, duplicative and costly. Rental Assistance Program (RAP) clients already have the right to a hearing. The regulations for the RAP program currently provide for an informal hearing by a disinterested housing official, consistent with the appeal rules in the federal Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, the program that the state RAP program is modeled upon. In addition, should the RAP client still be aggrieved, the RAP regulations provide for an additional appeal for a desk review by a designated DSS official.

We believe extending these appeal rights to a formal fair hearing process is unnecessary and costly. As written, the bill would not only require the provision of a formal hearing by a hearing officer of the department, it would extend the right to appeal the department's decision to the Superior Court.

In light of the additional costs and administrative burden that would result from this revision, as well as its inconsistency with the appeal processes in other housing programs, the department is opposed to the extension of the appeal rights as provided in this bill.

The bill would also increase funding for housing subsidies in the RAP program by an unspecified amount. Since there is no provision for such an expansion in the Governor's proposed mid-term budget adjustments the department must oppose such a program expansion.

H. B. No. 5622 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF SHELTER SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF HOUSEHOLD ABUSE AND AN APPROPRIATION FOR LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAMS FOR INDIGENT PERSONS.

The Department of Social Services' funding supports contracts with 16 domestic violence shelters and 2 host homes. These contractors provide safe and supportive shelter services to victims of domestic violence. Core services include 24-hour crisis hotlines, safety planning, support groups, counseling, advocacy, children's programs and community education. The contracts require 24/7 access to the shelter. For those who seek admittance to shelters without 24/7 on-site staffing, personnel facilitate access to shelter services via an on-call system. While the department is supportive of the concept of 24/7, such an expansion would require additional resources that are not currently budgeted for FY09. Attached is a breakdown on the funding, number of beds and individuals served.

H. B. No. 5623 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ELIGIBILITY FOR EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES.

This bill would make a minor adjustment to the emergency housing statute to allow individuals who have received a foreclosure judgment to qualify for the program without having to wait for the period of redemption to pass. The department supports this bill.

Our understanding is that the intent of this change is to permit individuals who have received a foreclosure judgment to qualify upon receiving the judgment for the Security Deposit Guarantee Program. The statute for that program (17b-802) conditions eligibility on a number of factors, but generally requires that an applicant have a circumstance that would qualify them for emergency housing payments under CGS 17b-808. The current wording of the statute does not allow a family to qualify for the Guaranteed Security Deposit program until within a day or two of when they are actually being displaced from the foreclosed property. At that point, they are in a crisis and it really is too late for us to intervene and help the family avoid homelessness. Allowing them to qualify earlier for the security deposit program would assist the family in their search for alternative housing and make it more likely they could stay housed.

The numbers of foreclosure actions resulting in individuals accessing the department's programs has been low historically, although the recent sub-prime mortgage crisis has the potential to increase the demand for the department's benefits. We also do not believe that it will result in an increase in emergency housing utilization as families will not leave their homes until forced to do so after the redemption period ends. We believe this minor change can help prevent homelessness for the affected families and is good public policy and therefore support this bill.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER SERVICES



DATA REPORT

A. Number of Shelters:	16
B. Number of Host Homes:	2
C. Number of Beds:	226

Emergency Shelters and Host Homes Sheltered

[Demographics]

Women	888
Young Children (0-12)	884
Teenagers	84
Elderly (60+)	8
Total	1864

Emergency Shelters and Host Homes Sheltered

[Length of Service]

Average (Nights)	22
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Emergency Shelters and Host Homes Sheltered

[Shelter Annual Funding FFY '07]

State Funding	\$2,146,552.00
Federal Funding	\$885,692.00
Total Funding	\$3,032,244.00