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**Child Advocate**

## **STATE OF CONNECTICUT**

### **OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE**

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#### Testimony

Faith Vos Winkel

Office of the Child Advocate

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Good morning Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Faith Vos Winkel, and I am an Assistant Child Advocate with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). I am also a member of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today regarding S. B. No. 163 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A STATE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT.

Forty-four years ago in his first State of the Union speech, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a "War On Poverty." Making poverty a national concern, President Johnson set in motion a series of bills and acts that created programs such as Head Start, food stamps, work-study, Medicare and Medicaid. These programs initiated under President Johnson brought about real results, helping to reduce rates of poverty and improve living standards for America's poor. Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go in eradicating poverty, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) could be one of the most important programs to help fight poverty since President Johnson's early initiatives.

Poverty does not just affect those who are not working. Sadly, we are seeing a rise in the number of people in Connecticut who are working full-time who still cannot afford housing, childcare, and transportation. A large portion children living in poverty have parents who are working but cannot make ends meet. We know that poverty influences every facet of a child's life, from conception to adulthood. In 2003, 88,600 Connecticut children lived in poverty. We also know that children in poverty are more likely to have:

- poor health
- infectious disease
- low birth weight
- lead poisoning
- asthma
- anemia
- growth stunting
- obesity
- missed immunizations
- hunger/food insecurity
- poorer health outcomes
- poor educational outcomes
- live disproportionately in homes & neighborhoods that are unsafe
- increased likelihood of abuse & neglect

Children in poverty are up to three times more likely to die during childhood. Reviewing the deaths of children in Connecticut is one of my primary responsibilities at the OCA. We

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have reviewed several troubling infant deaths over the past few of years. While some of these infant deaths had multiple risk factors, poverty was often prevalent in many of the cases.

### **Child Poverty**

According to the most recent figures from the Current Population Survey, child poverty in Connecticut declined from 12.4% in 2005 to 10.3% in 2006. However, a more valid measure of child poverty is a three-year average, which shows child poverty increasing slightly from 11.6% in 2003-2005 to 11.7% in 2004-2006. These figures represent all children in households with income below 100% of the federal poverty level.

Poverty among children below 200% of the federal poverty level remained level at 25.8% in both 2005 and 2006. A three-year average of children in households with income below 200% of the federal poverty level increased from 24.2% in 2003-2005 to 25.1% in 2004-2006.<sup>1</sup>

In 2004, 165,000 working families in Connecticut claimed the federal EITC, bringing \$268 million into the pockets of Connecticut's lower wage working families.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, the state is challenged to have a balanced budget, and balance the competing needs of so many constituents, as well as so many compelling issues. Nevertheless, supporting an initiative that will provide real assistance to children and families through the implementation of a state EITC is critically important. Over the past several years, the Child Poverty and Prevention Council have had experts come to Connecticut to discuss with us real ways in which to address the complex issues of poverty. From the most conservative experts to the most liberal experts, all agreed that implementing the EITC was a "no brainer" According to a 2006 report from the Brookings Institution, "In 2003, the EITC lifted 4.4 million people in low-income, working families out of poverty, more than one-half of them children." Supporting the EITC will support our state policy in reducing child poverty by 50% by 2014. On behalf of all children in Connecticut, we urge you to pass a state EITC.

Thank-you.

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<sup>1</sup> State of Connecticut, Poverty and Prevention Council Progress Report, January 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Voices for Children: The Earned Income Tax Credit-What it Does for CT, and How it Could Do Much More, March 2007.