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**Testimony of Paul Harper
In Support of HB 5799
Before the Planning and Development Committee
March 7, 2008**

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Good Morning. My name is Paul Harper, III. I was an employee at the Community Action Agency for three years until October 2007 when I was terminated for refusing to break the law. The administration directed energy assistance employees to falsify energy assistance applications and fabricate follow-up services. I refused to do so, and I was terminated.

Going back to February of 2007, I contacted Easter Howard, Chair of the Board of Directors, and I informed her of numerous issues I had with the supervision within the Energy Department. I had filed a grievance, which included that Cassandra Floyd, VP of Energy, had falsified my personnel file. Many of the employees within the department had serious issues with the management within Energy, specifically by Cassandra Floyd, and with the CEO, Amos Smith. However, nothing was ever done. I then contacted Easter Howard, Chair hoping that she would at least listen to my issues. Instead, she said that I should not have called her, and that she didn't want to know about any of the goings on within the department. She didn't want to hear anything about falsification of any kind. She did not want to be bothered and told me to go the CEO. Right after I contacted her, Amos Smith summoned me into his office and strongly warned me that I should get with the program, that I should be very careful, and that I should not ever again contact a member of the Board of Directors or I would be disciplined. It was clear to me that the Chair and the CEO were in absolute collusion. None of the other board members were even informed of my complaint. I felt very sure that my job was in jeopardy. I was ostracized and Cassandra Floyd also let me know that I should not contact the Board of Directors ever again, or I would face serious consequences. The CEO issued memos to staff and directed that any employee who contacted the Board of Directors would face discipline. All employees were intimidated and afraid.

In June 2007, the CEO and the Board of Directors formally changed the Employee Handbook to eliminate board involvement regarding employee grievances, which enables them to manipulate and control the process completely. No longer can employees formally prevail upon the Board of Directors for relief as a result of a grievance. The new policy, which became effective in June, eliminates any opportunity for an employee to be treated fairly and be heard, it totally insulates the CEO, and cements one's fate if he/she is in opposition to the CEO.

On October 24, 2007, after it was publicized that the agency was approving energy applications for illegal aliens, I publicly voiced my refusal to continue to falsify energy applications by including false follow-up information into the computer system. Employees were directed to do this so that the CEO could inflate the number of services given to clients, and inflate the number of actual applications taken. I threatened to report this wrongdoing to Roberta Saunders-Gray, the department director. On October 26, 2007 without warning I was terminated as a result of a trumped-up charge that I was incorrectly processing energy applications. I immediately filed a grievance regarding wrongful termination and submitted it to the Department Head Roberta Saunders-Gray. I called her to confirm that my grievance would be heard, and she said that it would. However, shortly after I was denied any grievance process whatsoever. Subsequent to the agency refusing to hear my grievance regarding my termination, I filed a CHRO discrimination complaint, along with a Whistleblower Retaliation complaint with the Office of Public Hearings. These two complaints are pending.

As fiduciaries of the Community Action Agency, it is vital for all of the members of the Board of Directors to be aware of reports of all kinds, including those including very important information from employees. This would ensure that a board member with their own agenda, or an agenda, which protects the CEO, would not be able to secretly exclude information from other members. There has been absolutely no fair or ethical mechanism to report wrongdoing at that agency. If an employee even hints at reporting wrongdoing, they are immediately disciplined for something, and threatened that they may possibly lose their job. Keeping information from the Board of Directors is seriously manipulative and deceptive. It provides the CEO, Senior Staff, or any employee with the opportunity to perpetrate fraud, misappropriate funds, falsify records, mismanage, etc. In the case of the Community Action Agency, the CEO AND the Board Chair controlled what information would be disseminated to the other members of the board.

Failure of the Board of Directors to address serious issues jeopardizes state and federal funding, which may affect services for the poor and underserved. Last March 2007, a member of the Senior Staff reported gross misappropriation of funds and falsification of records to the Board of Directors. They ignored the report, failed to investigate, and took no action at all. This report was the basis for the December 13, 2008 raid on the agency by the Office of the Inspector General, Health and Human Services. More recently, the Department of Motor Vehicles conducted thorough inspections of meals on wheels vehicles after reports that the Community Action Agency was forcing drivers, who are grossly underpaid, and who fail to speak out for fear of losing their jobs, to drive seriously dangerous vehicles. The DMV took most of the vehicles off the road. Why wasn't the Board of Directors knowledgeable about these dangerous vehicles? What is their excuse for exposing poorly paid workers to dangerous conditions?

The Board of Directors' failure to involve themselves in important issues within the agency enables management to manipulate funding, perpetrate employee abuse, and continue their self-serving efforts. Further, keeping information from the Board only forces separated employees to seek remedies from outside resources, i.e., CHRO complaints, lawsuits, etc., all of which cost the non-profit Community Action Agency an extensive amount of money in legal fees. These monies come from state and federal funding, which is composed from taxpayer dollars.

In sum, it is vital for the Board of Directors to be an impartial body, which is available to employees of the agency to hear about wrongdoing of any kind. They are supposed to ensure that the agency is available to the community at large. They should know about all disciplines, the reasons for the disciplines, and they should investigate allegations of all kinds. They absolutely must be included in the employee grievance process to ensure that information, which may be crucial to the operations of programs within the agency, is provided.

For these reasons, I prevail upon this body to implement legislation to mandate the composition of the Board of Directors, and effectuate changes to protect employees, clients, and taxpayers within the State of Connecticut.

Thank you for this opportunity and for your consideration.