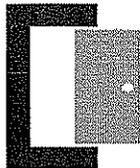


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Testimony Regarding House Bills #5311

An Act Increasing Temporary Family Assistance Benefits for Caretaker Relatives

Before the Select Committee on Aging

January 27, 2009

Prepared by Shirley Bergert

Recommended Action: SUPPORT the concept in this bill, but adjust language to carry out intent

This bill proposes raising the Department of Social Services (DSS) administered Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program benefits¹ to the level provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for foster care. While not clearly indicated in the bill, we understand it to be the intent to raise benefits in situations where *nonparent* caretaker relatives have assumed responsibility for raising children for whom they have no legal liability. Conn. Gen. Stat. §17b-112 could be amended to accomplish the goal of this proposed legislation, but the language must be modified. Suggested alternate language and its basis is provided at the end of this testimony.

There are good public policy reasons for the state to provide adequate assistance to allow relatives to care for children when the children's parents are unable to do so. 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. However, there is no public policy justification for the disparity in assistance provided by DCF or DSS in these situations.

Foster care benefits much more closely approximate the cost of providing for a child's basic needs. Foster care benefits paid by DCF, assuming a child is not medically complex, range between an average of \$782.62 and \$858.96 per month per child, regardless of whether the household receives a housing subsidy. By contrast, for most of Connecticut DSS provides \$354 in monthly benefits in the TFA program for one child or \$325 if the household receives a housing subsidy, with limited incremental increases in benefits if more than one child receives TFA.

¹ CT TANF benefits provided pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. §17b-112.



The following chart demonstrates the difference in monthly benefits received by a caretaker relative for a child, depending on whether benefits are received through DCF or DSS:

# of children	DSS		DCF
	TFA monthly benefit (no housing subsidy)	TFA monthly benefit (with housing subsidy)	Foster Care monthly benefit
1	\$354	\$325	\$782.62 - \$858.96
2	\$470	\$432	\$1565.24 - \$1717.92
3	\$576	\$530	\$2347.86 - \$2576.88

Benefits administered by DSS in the TFA program to support care of children in the custody of nonparent relatives, even if assistance is equal to the foster care payment, are significantly less costly to the state than children in foster care. DCF becomes the statutory parent of a child in the foster care system and must track the child and ensure his/her needs are met. Assistance payments through the DSS administered TFA program do not cause the state to incur such expenses.

Adequate support for children being raised by nonparent caretaker relatives will be welcomed by the selfless individuals, particularly those of limited means, who have taken responsibility for children who might otherwise become wards of the state. It will also encourage others in the future to take on the awesome but costly responsibility of raising a child to whom they have no legal obligation, particularly in situations where that individual may be financially unable to provide a home for a child without financial assistance.

Suggested Alternative Bill Language:

(2) The payment standard for a child [only assistance unit]* receiving temporary family assistance pursuant to this section in which the head of the household is a nonparent** caretaker relative shall be equal to the prevailing foster care rate paid by the Department of Children and Families for the equivalent number of children in a thirty-day month.

* We understand the intent of the proposal is to provide the foster care level benefit in the TFA program when a nonparent caretaker assumes responsibility for a child. It is possible for a TFA household to consist of an impoverished parent and his/her child (child 1) and a child for whom the parent otherwise did not have liability (e.g., nephew – child 2). DSS would treat this example as a TFA assistance unit of three. If “only assistance unit” is not deleted, a household in this situation could not receive the foster care level benefit for child 2, although a nonparent caretaker relative who was not as impoverished would receive the higher foster care level benefit.

** Under DSS policy, a “caretaker relative” includes parents who are legally liable for the child. If the bill language does not specify that increased benefits are limited to situations where the parent is not the caretaker, the language will raise TFA benefits for all households to the foster care rate.