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TESTIMONY

of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition

submitted to

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, December 9, 2009

Testimony of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition Before the Appropriations Committee

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony to you regarding the Governor's proposed 2010 Budget Deficit Mitigation Plan.

We know these are very difficult economic times, unlike anything we have experienced in recent history. The unemployment rate in Bridgeport exceeded 12% in October. The official unemployment rate does not include those who are discouraged from looking for a job but would jump to take one, or those who are involuntarily working part-time. BCAC's own survey of over 2,000 families during the first four months of 2009 found an alarming 30% unemployed.

We fully understand that the state budget must be cut. We know you will need to make hard choices. However, as the recession deepens, it is imperative that the state budget provide relief to those who are hardest hit by the severe economic downturn, not punish them further. We urge you not to balance the budget on the backs of struggling families.

Many of the proposed cuts will cost the state more in the long run. Freezing intake for SAGA, for example, will mean that adults cannot get the medical care or the prescriptions they need. Undoubtedly, they will end up in the emergency room at a much greater cost. Similarly, restricting adult dental care to emergencies is very shortsighted. Good dental care is integral to good health. Untreated dental conditions can lead to diabetes, heart disease and blood infections. Without coverage, many adults will forgo preventive dental care and end up needing more costly emergency care. The Governor is proposing to eliminate Medicaid coverage for eyeglasses. Are people who are low-income not entitled to see as clearly as those who are not poor?

We strongly urge that budget cuts and policy changes not be made that will limit access to HUSKY. We have been working long and hard in the community to ensure that low-income children and their families have access to health care. The governor's Budget Deficit Mitigation Plan proposes co-pays for low-income parents on HUSKY and increases in premiums for children on HUSKY B. When the state imposed co-pays on office visits and prescriptions several years ago for adults on HUSKY, thousands went without care because they could not afford the additional out-of-pocket costs.

The cost of child care is a major barrier preventing low-income parents from getting and keeping a job. Cutting state-funded child care centers means that more than 1,000 low-income children

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will lose child care, and as a result, their parents will likely need to leave their jobs, only adding to our already high unemployment and driving parents to welfare. Cutting Care4Kids, the child care subsidy program, will not only make child care unaffordable for low-income working parents, but also reduce revenue for child care providers, forcing some to close. Is this cost effective?

The list of proposed cuts to critically needed services goes on – low-income housing, nutrition assistance, job training. Nurturing Families, a program proven to reduce child abuse and neglect, is on the chopping block. The Commission on Children, which not only provides critical information, data, ideas and even staffing for both the legislative and executive branches, but also provides invaluable assistance to organizations across the state – eliminated. The budget for the Office of the Child Advocate will be cut by 50 percent. And this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Connecticut needs to spend smart and cut smart. We urge our state legislature to lead the charge and look at additional ways to increase revenues, such as closing tax loopholes that benefit the wealthy and big corporations. Roll back the reductions in the estate tax. The state should not be thinking of tax breaks at a time when low- and moderate-income families are bearing an unfair brunt of budget cuts.

We know some cuts will need to be made. However, as you make these cuts, we urge you to protect the health, early childhood, education and safety net services so critically needed by struggling families and their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony.

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The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) is a non-profit coalition of 80 member organizations funded in 1985. Our members represent a broad range of agencies including community centers, counseling organizations, early childhood programs, health centers, hospitals, churches and synagogues, and parent and civic organizations.