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Appropriations Committee

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Sen. Harp, Rep. Geragosian, Members of the Appropriations Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding Governor Rell’s November Deficit Mitigation Plan – particularly, her ill-conceived proposal to freeze intakes to State-Administered General Assistance (SAGA). This proposal is ill-conceived for the following reasons:

The Mitigation Plan indicates that this proposal will save the state 5.2 million dollars. The reality is that it will save the state probably five to ten times that amount by causing the collapse of Connecticut’s substance abuse treatment system. SAGA is not a program that people stay on for protracted periods of time. People with addictive disorders are often enrolled in SAGA in order that treatment and recovery services can be paid for. They get better, go to work and get off SAGA. Two of our programs would close without SAGA as a payment source. Freeze SAGA admissions, and you freeze payments for services.

The SAGA GA Behavioral Health Program accounts for 38% of services for our detoxification program. Without the ability to enroll people, there would be no payment. Our long term care center, Trinity Glen, is 59% funded by SAGA. Close these programs, and you save a lot in the SAGA account, but where do our clients needing help go? And what does that cost you?

Many will end up in the hospital emergency rooms. Ask the hospitals about that cost and how they feel about it. Many others will end up in jail. Last time I checked a day in jail was probably 10 to 20 times more expensive than a day at our long term care center. The Criminal Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch pays for and fills 14 beds at Trinity Glen because of the cost benefit. The cost is \$62 a day. You can’t stay at a Motel 6 for that, and they don’t provide treatment and recovery services.

In summary, the Governor got some very bad advice in suggesting a freeze of SAGA intakes. Don’t make the mistake of implementing it. You will hurt a lot of people and increase rather than reduce state spending.