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**Appropriations, Energy & Technology and Human Services Committees  
Testimony of Dr. James H. Gatling, President/CEO, New Opportunities, Inc.  
Public Hearing, September 15, 2009**

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the Appropriations, Energy and Technology and Human Services Committees. My name is Jim Gatling and I am the President/CEO of New Opportunities, Inc and Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association representing Connecticut's twelve community action agencies. I also serve as a member of the Low Income Energy Assistance Advisory Board, which has been meeting for the past four years for the purpose of examining the energy needs of CT's low income elderly, children and their families with our focus being to make the program better for those in need.

I would like to begin today by thanking the Connecticut Congressional delegation for the tremendous job they did last year in getting additional funding for the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program. Led by Congressman John Larson and Senator Chris Dodd, our state's delegation was instrumental in getting the largest energy assistance increase ever and for that they have the thanks of all of us in Community Action and the low-income customers we serve.

Secondly, I am here to endorse the Department of Social Services' plan on the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program. As you may know, the CAA network took approximately 130,000 energy applications this past season and provided energy assistance to almost 100,000 households. This represents an incredible amount of work for our energy intake workers over a short time period of only several months.

I am attaching a chart so that you can see the statewide increase for the past heating season's CEAP customer caseload.

## CASELOAD COMPARISON

	<u>2008/2009</u> (Thru 08/03/09)	<u>2007/2008</u> (Final Numbers)	<u>%</u> <u>Change</u> <small>(FFY 2009 vs. FFY 2008)</small>	<u>2007/2008</u>  (final numbers)	
ABCD (Bridgeport)	13,373	10,872	23.0%	10,872	23.0%
BCO (Bristol)	3,868	2,818	37.3%	2,818	37.3%
CACD (Danbury)	4,638	3,324	39.5%	3,324	39.5%
CRT (Hartford/Middletown)	33,227	26,410	25.8%	26,410	25.8%
TEAM (Derby)	4,974	3,603	38.1%	3,603	38.1%
HRAofNB (New Britain)	5,237	4,231	23.8%	4,231	23.8%
CAAofNH (New Haven)	14,921	12,332	21.0%	12,332	21.0%
NEON (Norwalk)	2,650	1,888	40.4%	1,888	40.4%
TVCCA (Norwich)	9,827	6,734	45.9%	6,734	45.9%
CTE (Stamford)	3,014	2,010	50.0%	2,010	50.0%
NO (Waterbury/Meriden)	24,921	18,898	31.9%	18,898	31.9%
ACCESS (Willimantic)	8,960	6,493	38.0%	6,493	38.0%
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>129,610</b>	<b>99,613</b>	<b>30.1%</b>	<b>99,613</b>	

Thirdly, I would like to suggest a way to simplify the program for both the customer and the intake workers. As you can see, the numbers are overwhelming. Our suggestion is to allow customers who receive state assistance to have automatic eligibility. We know that if our customers are on state assistance, then they are income eligible so it would streamline the process – for both our customers and our staff - if the state provided its customers with a simple form that shows their income for presentation to the energy worker. Having energy workers trying to access the state’s computer system for income verification is way too time consuming and is an unnecessary burden on the already over-burdened intake worker.

Finally we would like for you to consider allocating state funds to the energy assistance program for the purpose of year round operation of this important program - or at the very least, allocate state funds to provide for early intake into the energy assistance program. This year we had carry forward funds that allowed for early intake but we are never assured that

**this will be the case and the program is too important to too many residents to leave this to chance. We know the program works better when we have more time to work with our clients and don't have to shuffle them all through our doors over a 16 week time period. We currently operate on a shoe string budget and use other CAA funding sources to support this program, which is not a prudent way to manage. Our agencies are stretched way too thin and our workers are on the front lines of service delivery in a difficult economy with customers who present with many problems – this is an important point of entry and customers should expect to receive friendly, efficient and comprehensive service.**

**We need to be very watchful during the coming year to make sure that poor people in this great and wealthy state don't get left out in the cold. On behalf of Connecticut's Community Action Agencies we look forward to working with the Department of Social Services and you to protect our most vulnerable population. Thank you.**