



Written Testimony before the Select Committee on Children

In opposition to H.B. 6411 An Act Concerning Reduction in Child Poverty and Investment in Prevention

Section 1 of this bill requires that the Department of Social Services work with community-based agencies to establish an emergency response system to meet the basic needs of children and families who require such program benefits and services. It requires that the department work with the Child Poverty and Prevention Council to develop protocols related to such services. The intent is to increase access to safety net programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, Care 4 Kids, heating and rental assistance, eviction prevention services and free and reduced school breakfast and lunch programs.

The department supports the concept behind this proposal of assuring that families in crisis have ready access to programs to help meet their basic needs when they are in crisis. However, the department already has systems in place to address these needs through the United Way of Connecticut's 211 information and referral services and the community action agencies' Human Services Infrastructure (HSI) systems. The department already uses the HSI community action agency sites to either directly enroll or assist low-income families and individuals with enrollment in many of the programs listed. Some of these programs, such as WIC and school meal programs are not within the department's purview and may have specific requirements for enrollment through alternative processes. These HSI and United Way 211 systems are already designed to connect families with the services in their community that can help meet such needs. There is no need to establish an alternative system for this purpose as proposed in this bill.

The bill further calls for identifying cost saving measures to prevent homelessness and increase housing stability. The department is working closely with the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness and local homelessness prevention initiatives, such as Hartford's Journey Home Initiative, on homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing strategies for homeless families or those at risk of homelessness. Again there is no need for a separate initiative in this area.

The proposal calls for the department to identify regulations and procedures to be streamlined to increase access to such programs. Again the department has been working hard over the past few years to reduce procedural barriers to access to our programs by establishing presumptive eligibility processes and outreach for HUSKY, as well as changes to our SNAP program to allow for telephone interviews in place of the in-office interview at time of application and renewal of eligibility, as well as expansions to serve additional families such as the Expanded Categorical Eligibility initiative provided for in the Governor's budget. Yet again we do not need another organization framework for conducting this work. A modernization initiative currently underway within the department will provide an on-line screening tool and web-based

application process to allow people to apply for the department's benefits either from their own homes or with the assistance of the department's community partners. One of the primary strategic goals of that initiative is to improve access to these programs.

Regarding the bill's provision calling for pursuing additional federal funds under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's Employment and Training Program, the department expects to release a request for qualifications by the end of the month to solicit community collaboratives or other employment and training providers to participate in an expansion of the program as required by Public Act 08-161. Another statutory mandate for this purpose is not needed.

The bill also calls for yet another mandatory report to the General Assembly regarding these matters. Although the department is always willing to provide the General Assembly with information about our work, mandating yet another such report when the department's resources are already stretched is not appropriate.

This bill adds unnecessary reporting and bureaucracy at a time when we need to be more efficient with our limited staff resources. For this reason and the other reasons provided above, the department is opposed to this bill.

For additional information on this testimony or any other legislation concerning the Department of Social Services, contact Matthew Barrett at (860) 424-5012 or via email at matthew.barrett@ct.gov