



**BIRMINGHAM GROUP
Health Services, Inc.**

Providing Hope - Changing Lives...

Providing outpatient clinical, case management, rehabilitation, domestic violence, and substance abuse prevention and education services to the Lower Naugatuck Valley and surrounding communities.

Written Testimony of Elaine Liberto
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Thursday, February 11, 2010
Before the

The Appropriations Human Resources Subcommittee Public Hearing

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Prague, Representative Hamm, Representative Villano, and esteemed members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the proposed FY2011 State Budget. My name is Elaine Liberto and I represent the Birmingham Group Health Services; a community health organization that has been operating for over 30 years. We work with families and children through providing mental health, addiction, domestic violence, ex-offender, and rehabilitation services.

The Governor's SFY2011 proposed budget would eliminate the Commission on Children. This would "save" the State approximately \$200,000, but it would cost the State far more. The Commission actively works to find untapped federal funding sources and bring federal dollars to our state. One example with which we are personally familiar is SNAP E&T. Without the support from the Commission on Children, it would definitely been unlikely that the Valley Collaborative would have submitted an application for the SNAP E&T program. Previously, I have had other occasions to benefit from the Commission's work during my tenure as Director of Early Child Care in both the Bridgeport and Norwalk Community Action Agencies.

Given the current recession and state budget difficulties, SNAP E&T is particularly important. Through SNAP E&T approximately \$9.25 million of federal money will come back to Connecticut. The Ansonia and The Valley SNAP E&T is estimating \$546,000 in reimbursed federal funds for Year 1, and may expect this amount to regularly increase. This funding will allow the participating towns to continue to provide vital programming to adult learners, mental health and ex-offender consumers. The Commission on Children was critical in the application process and was responsible for the following:

- Locating this federal funding stream (SNAP E&T);
- Engaging national experts on these funds to train both the Executive and Legislative branches on the opportunity;
- Assisting in drafting legislation (PA 08-161) to maximize use of the funds and to detail how the reimbursement dollars should be utilized;
- Informing strategic partners of the SNAP E&T opportunity and facilitating a collaborative application;
- Facilitating the applications of 95 towns in 13 collaborative applications;
- Working with DSS and the collaboratives to address issues that came up during negotiation of the Memoranda of Agreement.

During this past year, Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Commission on Children, facilitated a "Community Conversation on Children and Poverty in the Valley" forum conducted by the Valley Council of Health & Human Service Organizations in collaboration with TEAM, the local CAP agency. Approximately 75 people and organizations came together to identify gaps in critical issues, establish priorities and develop potential next steps to reduce poverty for children and families locally. Elaine worked her usual magic and drew connections between issues raised and potential solutions, encouraging partnerships and shedding light on best practices in other regions of the state and country.

In addition to the above, during my approximate 10 year tenure as Director of Early Childcare, there were numerous occasions in which the Commission on Children strongly advocated on behalf of inner-city children and families to raise the quality of life by strategically impacting the issues and some of the barriers that exist. In most of the above areas, identification of these additional revenues or strategically identifying barriers and issues that affect poverty would not have been realized by our agency without the assistance of the Commission on Children due to lack of local staffing to target these crucial issues and opportunities.

I thank you for your time and attention. I certainly appreciate the challenges before you now and in the year ahead. I realize you need to both cut expenses and increase revenues. However, cutting the Commission on Children, an agency that identifies federal and private funds and best practices nationwide and then mobilizes to bring those effective programs and dollars to Connecticut, is not the way to go. Please keep this small agency that produces big results for Connecticut's families. Thank you.