



H. B. No. 5018 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2011

Appropriations Committee
February 11, 2010

Good evening members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security outreach, advocacy and education organization. I would like to address four issues concerning the Governor's mid-term adjustments to the budget: SNAP, or Food Stamp, timeliness, the Human Services Infrastructure, the Commission on Children and increased revenues.

Last year the Governor announced a great initiative for SNAP/Food Stamps. By increasing the income limit to 185% of the federal poverty level, this federal option increased the reach of the SNAP/food stamp program to many more people who were not eligible previously – many who have been laid off, or out of a job, and many who never expected to need the program but are happy they can get the benefit. Since assets are no longer counted we are seeing more people who are on the program for the first time.

Unfortunately the increase of eligibility was at the same time as the retirements in our state government. This has had devastating effects for those who are trying to get on this fully funded federal program. Also, let me be clear that the state of Connecticut has received funding from ARRA to increase administration of the program and there is more on its way. It is my understanding that DSS has hired some eligibility workers with ARRA funds, however it takes many months to train eligibility and intake workers. Additionally, I want to ensure that this funding is actually going to the program.

DSS reported last month that there was an increase of 30% of the number of people on SNAP – which is far more than any other program they administer. However there are many people who are not getting on the program in a timely manner. For example:

- Expedited SNAP benefits – has a 7 day turnaround as these are for people who are in dire need:
 - They have no more than \$150 in income and no more than \$100 in assets; or
 - They have shelter expenses that are more than their income; or
 - They are a season migrant worker.

According to a survey of expedited SNAP cases in December, 2009, there were 480 cases pending of which 438 had been pending for more than the allowable time – or 7 calendar days. That is a 91% overdue rate for those who basically have nothing and need food.

As for regular SNAP cases DSS is seeing a big problem with timeliness. Nationally, Connecticut is 13th worst state in getting SNAP benefits to those who apply in a timely manner. At End Hunger Connecticut! we have seen an extraordinary increase in those who are looking to get on the program – in fact from December 15 – January 14 we saw the number of people calling our SNAP toll-free phone line double – we received 369 calls during that time. Our office is inundated with people; our SNAP benefit calculator is seeing increased traffic, and bringing us more people. Our outreach staff sees the effects of the increase

need – DSS workers are telling people whose applications are incomplete to come to EHC! for assistance, and we are following up for those who have not received their benefits.

End Hunger Connecticut! outreach workers assisted 382 households (of which there were 299 families and 776 household members) with NEW applications from October – December of last year – I must reiterate that these were NEW applications only. Our workers are able to ensure that eligible people go to DSS with a complete application ready to be granted. It is not enough to tell people they are eligible for SNAP, we need to assist them with their applications. Unfortunately as the grid below shows people are not getting the benefits in a timely manner – 30 days from the date of application to DSS for SNAP benefits. The problem is getting increasingly worse.

Total of cases overdue for any reason, from Alvarez reports (Connecticut Legal Services):

Month	Food stamps (SNAP)	
	Cases overdue	Total cases pending at end of month; (percentage of pending case that are overdue)
December, 2009	1,961	5,073 (39%)
November, 2009	1882	5,402 (35%)
October, 2009	1526	6,162 (25%)
September 2009	1148	5,947 (19%)
August 2009	811	5,751 (14%)
July 2009	771	5,200 (14.8%)
June, 2009	849	4,581 (18.5%)
May, 2009	818	4,002 (20.4%)
April, 2009	767	4,285 (17.9%)
March 2009	743	4,503 (16.5%)
February 2009	670	4,176 (16%)
January 2009	604	4,210 (14.3%)
December, 2008	710	3,530 (20%)

Connecticut is on a watch list with the USDA and is one of 9 states that may incur financial penalties from the USDA if the payment error rate exceeds 105 percent of the national performance measure – which Connecticut did exceed in 2008.

What can we do? DSS must continue to work with community partners, and should use federal funds that will be available next week solely for administration of the SNAP/food stamp program. Community partners like EHC!, Hispanic Health Council and Connecticut Association of Human Services will continue to prepare people so they are 100% ready to go to DSS and that will help move the process exponentially. EHC! has trained workers at Foodshare, the food bank for Hartford and Tolland counties, to work with volunteers to help with application assistance. Unfortunately, our staff is overwhelmed with the critical need – however, we are certain that we can train people from the community quickly to get more people ready for enrollment. I would like to be clear that in no way are we looking to privatize the program – as experience across the country proves that the cure is worse than the illness.

There are a number of ways that community partners can help, and we will be working with DSS to do so, but we need, and I implore that we get, the support of the legislature to use federally appointed funds for SNAP/food stamp administration.

It is for this reason that the Human Services Infrastructure, or HSI, not be cut in any way. Now is absolutely not the time to take a program that is getting people the benefits they need RIGHT NOW and it is clear that DSS is incapable of getting people onto these programs independently. Additionally, SNAP benefits are fully federally funded and are an economic stimulus in the communities that the funds go to – many low income communities that need the growth.

The successful outreach done by EHC!, the Connecticut Association for Human Services and the Hispanic Health Center is funded federally. However the funds must be matched by state monies. Currently, we are matched by the Human Services Infrastructure (or HSI). Losing the match could have the potential of cutting off federally-funded SNAP outreach. Every SNAP benefit dollar generates \$1.73 in economic activity in the community. **The General Fund funds for HSI can bring in 3 times their face value and loss of HSI would be devastating for all of those that need the comprehensive services they screen for.**

Additionally, the Governor's mid-term adjustments call for the elimination of the Commission on Children. This would be a mistake, not only for the welfare of our children but for the economy of the state. EHC! works with the Commission on Children on obesity related policy and we have found this commission to be one of the only state agencies to take on child obesity in a planned programmatic way that really affects change. The Commission is able to look at the whole child and his or her environment and develop solutions.

The work that the Commission has done to bring SNAP Employment and Training funds to the state has not only increased federal funds coming to Connecticut but increases the employability of those on SNAP/Food Stamps. When the Governor talks about creating jobs and bringing funds to the state, it is foolish to cut one organization that is doing just that.

The Commission's work on the Child Poverty legislation and on the Speaker's Task Force on Children and the Recession has been instrumental on moving the state's commitment to ending child poverty. There is a broad reach with the Commission, it is very active and result oriented and their research and policy is well used by the community, and helps EHC! with our work.

Finally, I believe it is important to note that we cannot rely on further spending cuts in this budget. People need the resources available to them, and they need to access them. Further cuts only make it more difficult to get the resources therefore creating a greater need for those resources.

We need a balanced approach that addresses the state's structural revenue problem with a revenue solution. Specifically, we urge you to support the revenue options proposed by the Better Choices for Connecticut coalition, including closing corporate tax loopholes, evaluating corporate tax breaks to see whether CT is actually getting an economic return on its investment, delaying reductions in the estate tax, and increasing income taxes on households most able to pay – while looking at other tax options that create physical health in the state.

Thank you so much for you time this evening.