



Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Appropriations Committee, February 11, 2009  
Testimony submitted by Lucy Potter, Attorney  
Greater Hartford Legal Aid

**Re: DSS Budget, oppose cuts to HUSKY. Remain aware of ongoing effect of past cuts to DSS**

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid, here to testify against further cuts to the HUSKY program. I also want to alert you to the real harm in DSS functioning that has resulted from last year's staff reduction. In the twenty-five years I have worked at Legal Aid, DSS has never been as dysfunctional as it is now.

DSS Staffing Levels

I urge you to drive by the DSS office at 3580 Main Street, any morning before the doors open at 8:30. You are likely to see a long line of people winding down the street. Try calling the main number, (860)723-1000. The odds of getting a live person on the phone are not high. Meanwhile, more and more people have lost work and need DSS services: medical coverage, food assistance, and cash assistance. DSS is falling further and further behind in meeting the time frames the laws set for processing applications.

Maybe the starkest example of this delay is with expedited SNAP (food stamp) benefits. When people show up at DSS and have income that is less than their shelter expense, they are supposed to receive SNAP benefits in seven calendar days. This is federal law. The idea is that this group is at great risk and needs help fast. Yet DSS reports for December shows that 438 of 480 expedited cases that were pending at the end of the month had been pending for more than seven days. This is a delay rate of 91%. DSS is unable to meet its fundamental mission. Staffing in the central office also seems to be at skeletal levels, and I see significant delay in their ability to implement program changes and respond to issues from the regions. While this budget proposal does not target DSS staffing, I urge you to be aware of the effect any further cuts could have, in the event such cuts are proposed.

HUSKY

I am very concerned that the proposed cuts in the HUSKY program will seriously limit the ability of the lowest income participants to get medical care. Specifically:

Co-payments- This proposal would raise the co-payments for HUSKY A families to \$10 or \$15, the amount paid under the state-employee plan. These are not nominal amounts for families with incomes below, often well below, 185% of poverty. They will deter families from getting treatment, especially for chronic conditions, which require multiple doctor visits.

Vision care- the proposal restricts coverage for glasses to services provided by ophthalmologists, not optometrists. The projected \$4.6 million in savings seems likely to come at the expense of people, who need them, not getting glasses, and being less productive, less able to learn and less able to contribute.

I know your task is difficult. Thank you for this opportunity to share my views.

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