AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN IN THE RECESSION.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (Effective from passage) (a) There is established a children in the recession leadership team to implement and coordinate the state's emergency response to children affected by the recession. The team shall consist of the following members, or their designees: the Commissioners of Public Health, Education, Children and Families, Social Services, Higher Education and Developmental Services, the Labor Commissioner and the Chairman of the Child Poverty and Prevention Council, established pursuant to section 4-67x of the general statutes. The leadership team may meet at any time, except that such team shall meet monthly if (1) the unemployment rate is greater than eight per cent, or (2) there is a decline in the gross domestic product of more than two per cent since the preceding quarter.

(b) The children in the recession leadership team shall work in a coordinated manner across government to implement an emergency response, within available appropriations,
that (1) mitigates the long-term impact of economic recessions on children; (2) provides appropriate assistance and resources to families to minimize the number of children who enter poverty and the impact of the recession that extends into adulthood through lost earnings and poor health; and (3) prevents human and fiscal costs of recessions, including foreclosures, child hunger, family violence, school failure, youth runaways, homelessness, child abuse and neglect. The leadership team shall develop and implement policies, practices and procedures that reduce the impact of the recession on children, in both fiscal and personal terms, through (A) improved program and policy coordination; (B) cross-agency strategic planning; (C) increased efficiencies and access points for agency clients; (D) streamlined communications for families needing to access state services; (E) short-term changes in procedures as needed to decrease family crisis and poverty; (F) coordinated outreach; and (G) federal funds maximization, including all opportunities for employability and education.

(c) For purposes of this section, the children in the recession leadership team shall perform, within available appropriations, the following functions to mitigate the impact of the recession on children: (1) Share resource information and strategic planning to address the immediate human and fiscal costs arising from the recession; (2) train pertinent personnel on the availability of services, access points and interventions across agencies, including child trauma treatment, to help families reach and utilize necessary services; (3) link job training and education pathways and opportunities; (4) create and implement a plan to identify and support families who are at increased risk of abuse or neglect in the declining economy; (5) develop and implement efforts to coordinate outreach, increase and improve access, establish multiple enrollment sites where feasible and in response to the urgent need for services resulting from the recession, reduce current response times to clients and new applicants for safety net programs, including, but not limited to, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and
Children, the temporary family assistance program, the child care
subsidy program, heating and rental assistance, eviction prevention
services and free and reduced preschool meal programs; (6) identify
regulations to be revised and procedures to be streamlined to increase
access to such programs; (7) maximize the availability of targeted case
management and intervention services; and (8) maximize all federal
opportunities in financing to assist families with jobs and services in
the recession.

(d) Not later than January 1, 2011, and biannually thereafter, a
representative of the children in the recession leadership team shall
appear before a joint meeting of the select committee of the General
Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children and the
joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance
of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies
and human services and make an oral report on (1) progress in
implementing the provisions of this section, and (2) other government
actions taken to reduce the impact of the recession on children and
families in the state.

Sec. 2. (NEW) (Effective from passage) (a) The Department of Social
Services, in partnership with the Labor Department and the
Departments of Education, Public Health and Children and Families,
shall seek, within available appropriations, to promote efficiency,
reduce costs and administrative error rates and simplify the
application process for families eligible for benefits by streamlining
and integrating public information and access to programs.

(b) For the purpose of subsection (a) of this section, the Department
of Social Services shall develop, within available appropriations, a plan
for a comprehensive state service approach that may include (1) a
single-point-of-entry procedure for state-funded programs and
services to provide information and access to eligible services through
whatever state agency entry point at which the client seeks
information, including the Departments of Social Services, Public
Health, Education and Children and Families, and the Labor Department, and, including, but not limited to, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, child care assistance, unemployment and medical assistance and insurance; (2) the promotion of combined, on-line application and enrollment processes for programs that serve children or families; (3) the use of the Internet to develop and increase public access to on-line screening tools, benefit calculators and on-line applications that facilitate prompt access to programs and benefit information; and (4) the promotion of access to direct assistance with application and enrollment processes through community-based organizations. Not later than January 31, 2011, the department shall submit the plan to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to human services and to the select committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children. The department may establish a partnership with philanthropic organizations to accomplish the purposes and financing of this section.

(c) The Department of Social Services shall develop, within available appropriations, and in accordance with the provisions of federal law, a client-friendly and reasonable timeline within which applications shall not be required to be resubmitted if a family recently applied for services and changes in eligibility temporarily have altered the application process or the program closed to applications and then reopened.

Sec. 3. (NEW) (Effective from passage) The Department of Social Services, within available appropriations, shall seek to help parents work, job train or look for employment while children are safe and learning. The department shall (1) continue to accept applications and provide benefits to eligible applicants to the child care subsidy program, established pursuant to section 17b-749 of the general statutes, at any time when the state unemployment rate is eight percent or higher; and (2) provide timely public notice if, for any reason, the child care subsidy program is not available to all eligible families.
or its eligibility or program status is altered. Any change in eligibility or program terms shall be effective not less than sixty days after public notice of such change. Funds available for the child care subsidy program for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2010, shall be strictly and fully utilized for child care purposes that enable parents to work and children to thrive.

Sec. 4. (NEW) (Effective from passage) (a) The Department of Social Services, in collaboration with the Departments of Education, Children and Families, Higher Education and Economic and Community Development, shall seek, within available appropriations, to impede homelessness, which increases insecurity, poor school performance and behavioral problems for children, by (1) continuing the rental assistance program allowing families to afford housing; (2) assuring foreclosure prevention and mitigation through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, the Connecticut Fair Housing Center and the Department of Economic and Community Development; and (3) providing incentives to towns that promote affordable housing.

(b) In the case where a family or youth is homeless, the Department of Social Services, in collaboration with said departments and within available appropriations, shall (1) ensure full utilization of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to protect children falling into homelessness from school failure and dropping out of school and to improve access to higher education eligibility; (2) allocate existing funding to ensure the availability of homeless shelters that accept intact families or that assist families to find adequate alternative arrangements that allow the family to remain together; (3) review program eligibility requirements and other policies to ensure that unaccompanied homeless children have access to critical services that such children might otherwise have been prevented from receiving due to age or guardianship requirements; and (4) work, in accordance with the provisions of federal law, with appropriate state agencies to effectuate short-term waivers of income garnishment by such state agencies in order to protect children and families from hardship and
keep families together in cases where such waivers are deemed appropriate by the commissioner of the department attempting to secure a garnishment.

Sec. 5. (NEW) (Effective from passage) The Department of Social Services shall collaborate with the Departments of Public Health and Education to decrease hunger resulting from the recession by coordinating, within available appropriations, state-wide public access, information and outreach, and promoting, within available appropriations, cross-enrollment and collocation of entry points and application processes for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children in order to improve nutritional access for families, increase federal reimbursements and diminish the effects of food insecurity on children's cognition, behavior, developmental growth and educational achievement.

Sec. 6. (NEW) (Effective July 1, 2010) The Department of Education shall administer, within available appropriations, a child nutrition outreach program to increase participation in the federal School Breakfast Program, federal Summer Food Service Program and federal Child and Adult Care Food Program. The outreach program shall:

(1) Encourage schools to (A) participate in the federal School Breakfast Program; (B) employ innovative breakfast service methods where students eat their breakfast in their classrooms or elsewhere after school starts, rather than only before school and only in the cafeteria; and (C) apply to the in-classroom breakfast grant program pursuant to section 10-215g of the general statutes; and

(2) (A) Encourage local and regional school districts to sponsor Summer Food Service Program sites; (B) recruit other sponsors of such sites; and (C) make grants to site sponsors to assist them in increasing child participation;

(3) Encourage day care centers to participate in the Child and Adult
Care Food Program; and

(4) Publicize the availability of federally-funded child nutrition programs throughout the state.

Sec. 7. (NEW) (Effective from passage) (a) The Department of Social Services shall maximize federal fund opportunities from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund established pursuant to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act P.L. 111-5, in order to assist families and workers facing unemployment, housing crises, increasing debt, homelessness or other hardships. The department shall seek to utilize:

(1) The nonrecurrent, short-term benefits category of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund for eligible purposes, including, but not limited to, housing, transportation, work expenses, family safety, low-birth weight reduction, food and nutrition. The benefits funded pursuant to this subdivision may include, but not be limited to, mortgage assistance, eviction relief, car repair, work clothes, domestic violence services, home visitation, on-the-job training and TANF extensions for parents who are unable to find employment; and

(2) The subsidized employment category of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund for eligible purposes, including, but not limited to, youth employment programs and the alleviation of specific labor shortages and state worker shortages where the jobs created help families apply for state services.

(b) The department shall work with the private sector, including philanthropic, business and nonprofit agencies as well as any consortium of such groups, for eligible purposes and as third-party participants to qualify for, access and maximize federal funding from said emergency fund through donation, in-kind spending and training of subsidized workers.

(c) The department shall implement the provisions of this section
within available resources.

Sec. 8. (NEW) (Effective from passage) Not more than sixty days after the effective date of this section, the Department of Social Services, within available appropriations, shall establish a procedure for implementing the following modifications in the temporary assistance of needy families program whenever the state unemployment rate exceeds eight per cent: (1) The Jobs First program shall permit and encourage parents to pursue education and training and shall approve, as work activities, two-year and four-year degree programs; and (2) make the requirements for a third extension of temporary family assistance cash assistance, pursuant to section 17b-112 of the general statutes, the same as the requirements for a first or second extension. The department shall seek federal support to pay for such modifications through funds provided from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund.

Sec. 9. (NEW) (Effective from passage) The Department of Public Health, within available appropriations and in collaboration with the Departments of Social Services and Education, shall endeavor to prevent the increase in low-birth-weight infants resulting from the recession, to reduce the cost to the state from unnecessary hospitalizations of such infants, as well as the health and cognitive injury to children resulting from such condition, and to decrease the growing racial disparity in the rates of occurrence of low-birth-weight infants by (1) maximizing coenrollment in the federal Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children and Medicaid for all eligible women; (2) encouraging tobacco cessation programs targeted to pregnant women; and (3) promoting the use of the centering pregnancy model of prenatal care. The department may recover the costs of implementing the provisions of this section through funds available from the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund established under section 4-28f of the general statutes and the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund.
Sec. 10. (NEW) (Effective July 1, 2010) (a) As used in this section:

(1) "Eligible student" means (A) any student enrolled in an accredited institution of higher education in this state; or (B) any resident of this state enrolled in an accredited institution of higher education; and

(2) "Qualifying loan" means a loan to an eligible student that is (A) originated by a participating bank, credit union or other entity; (B) subject to the participating bank's, credit union's or entity's underwriting standards applicable to student loans; (C) subject to an interest rate not exceeding six per cent per annum for loans; and (D) disbursed not later than July 1, 2011.

(b) The Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, within available appropriations and in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education, shall establish a partnership with Connecticut banks, Connecticut credit unions or any other entities for the provision of qualifying loans to eligible students who experience difficulty in obtaining financing for post-secondary education because of more restrictive underwriting criteria, reduced access to home equity loans or decreased market value of homes.

(c) The Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management shall establish, within available appropriations, a program to guarantee qualifying loans pursuant to this section. Such program shall provide a first-loss guarantee to participating banks, credit unions or other entities not to exceed twenty per cent of the outstanding principal amount of qualifying student loans originated by such banks, credit unions or entities. The amount of any individual loan guaranteed by the state shall not exceed twenty per cent of the original principal balance thereof.

Sec. 11. (Effective from passage) The Commission on Children, within available appropriations and in collaboration with the private sector, shall research the viability of enacting a state children and the
recession fund that would provide funds and low-interest loans to families facing short-term crisis in housing, utilities, hunger and unemployment. Not later than January 1, 2011, the commission shall report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, its findings to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies.

Sec. 12. (NEW) (Effective from passage) The Commission on Children, within available appropriations, shall coordinate information on youth leadership opportunities that keep youth engaged in the community. The commission shall inform the General Assembly and the public of such opportunities.

Sec. 13. (NEW) (Effective from passage) Not later than January 1, 2011, and biannually thereafter, the Commissioner of Social Services shall appear before a joint meeting of the select committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to children and the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies and to human services and make an oral report on (1) the progress in implementing the provisions of section 1 and sections 3 to 7, inclusive, of this act, and (2) other government actions taken to reduce the impact of the recession on children and families.

Sec. 14. (NEW) (Effective from passage) (a) The Department of Social Services shall analyze the policies and interventions promoted pursuant to section 1 and sections 3 to 7, inclusive, of this act utilizing results-based accountability to determine their impact. The department shall submit, on or before January 1, 2011, and annually thereafter, a results-based accountability report card on such impact to the General Assembly and the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.
(b) The Department of Education shall analyze the policies and interventions promoted pursuant to section 6 of this act utilizing results-based accountability to determine their impact. The department shall submit, on or before January 1, 2011, and annually thereafter, a results-based accountability report card on such impact to the General Assembly and the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

(c) The Department of Public Health shall analyze the policies and interventions promoted pursuant to section 9 of this act utilizing results-based accountability to determine their impact. The department shall submit, on or before January 1, 2011, and annually thereafter, a results-based accountability report card on such impact to the General Assembly and the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations and the budgets of state agencies, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:

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Statement of Purpose:
To implement the recommendations of the task force on children in the recession.

[Proposed deletions are enclosed in brackets. Proposed additions are indicated by underline, except that when the entire text of a bill or resolution or a section of a bill or resolution is new, it is not underlined.]