



Written Testimony before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 17, 2010

IN OPPOSITION TO SB 424 AN ACT CONCERNING CONSOLIDATION AND CREATION OF THE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES CONSOLIDATION STEERING COMMITTEE.

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in opposition to SB 424 An Act Concerning Consolidation and Creation of Health and Human Services Consolidation Steering Committee.

This bill would create a steering committee to develop a five-year plan for the consolidation of the Departments of Social Services, Public Health, Developmental Services, Children and Families and Mental Health and Addiction Services into the new "Department of Human Services."

The monumental size alone of such an unprecedented department would be staggering, leading to the logical question of whether it could even be a manageable enterprise, among many other pragmatic concerns and difficulties.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) – which itself was created in 1993 as a significantly-sized department from the merger of three human service agencies (Departments of Income Maintenance, Human Resources and Aging) -- has an approximately \$5 billion budget and administers close to 100 different programs serving a vast array of populations in all stages of life. The department serves over one half million clients. One need only take a quick look at the DSS website to get an idea of the broad and complex range of programs under our jurisdiction. Some examples of our programming include:

- HUSKY A&B
- Medicaid for the Aged, Blind and Disabled
- Charter Oak Health Plan
- Medicare Savings Programs
- CT Dental Health Partnership
- CT Behavioral Health Partnership
- ConnPACE
- CT Home Care Program for Elders
- Personal Care Assistance Waiver
- Alzheimer's Respite Program
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps)
- Domestic Violence Shelters
- Child Care subsidy programs
- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
- Bureau of Child Support Enforcement
- Children's Trust Fund

- Jobs First Employment Services
- Rental Assistance Program
- Supportive Housing
- Homeless Shelters
- Nursing Home rate setting and Certificate of Need
- Long Term Care Ombudsman

All of our programs are in line with the department's unique mission to provide vital services to:

- Meet basic needs of food, shelter, economic support and health care;
- Promote and support the choice to live with dignity in one's own home and community, and
- Promote and support the achievement of economic viability in the workforce.

Our sister agencies all have their own unique missions and have expertise in serving the specific needs of the populations they serve.

Many of our programs receive a complex combination of state and federal funding with requirements that differ from program to program. Some of our programs operate under waivers from the federal government; others must follow strict program guidelines mandated by the federal government, which if not adhered to, result in fines and penalties to the state. Some programs are required to be operated under a 'single state agency,' the most notable example being the largest-budgeted state program – Medicaid.

We understand the desire to find efficiencies and streamline government. However, it is difficult to see how creating one immense human services agency would create any meaningful efficiencies, most significantly for the vulnerable populations we serve.

Furthermore, in assuming that wholesale consolidation is the best approach to human services delivery in the state, the bill fails to acknowledge the broad differences between the already-huge agencies that currently deliver these health, social and human services (including the large Departments of Developmental Disabilities and Children and Families). While DSS often collaborates with our sister agencies (a shining example of this is the CT Behavioral Health Partnership with DCF and DMHAS), there would inevitably be harmfully competing priorities for management attention and resources if all of these agencies with various service mandates were under one roof. We wonder how such conflicts would be resolved and which priorities would take precedence over others. We submit that the question should first be asked if such a merger is truly feasible and cost-effective at all before embarking down this road legislatively.

Thank you for your consideration of the department's concerns on SB 424.