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**Testimony before the Select Committee on Children
Re: H.B. 5360 – An Act Concerning Children in the Recession
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Deputy Director
Connecticut Association for Human Services
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Good afternoon, Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and members of the Select Committee on Children. I am Maggie Adair, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a 100-year-old statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and to engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

I am testifying in support of H.B. 5360 – An Act Concerning Children in the Recession. This bill addresses many important factors that contribute to child poverty, which is exacerbated in an economic downturn as deep as the one families are experiencing in Connecticut. An estimated additional 35,000 children will fall into poverty in Connecticut in this current economic downturn. We also know that when the recession ends, those same children will remain in poverty for another five to seven years. The impact of children thrown into poverty for this length of time has long-term ramifications in terms of educational outcomes, income, and productivity.

As a member of the Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession, I heard first-hand about the tremendous challenges that families cope with every day as they struggle to pay bills, put food on the table, and a roof over their head. I listened to the stories of young people who feel desperate, who experience hunger every day, and who feel the pain of their parents who are doing everything they can to provide for their children.

I also listened to people presenting to the Task Force about needed policy and practice solutions. Many of their ideas are incorporated into this bill and should be given consideration.

This bill seeks to: 1) improve service delivery, system and processes; 2) promote cross-agency communication; 3) expand community outreach; 3) keep parents working or give them resources to look for work; 4) expand educational opportunities for low-income parents; 5) maximize federal funding and coordination; and 6) require outcome measurement and transparency.

I would like to comment on key provisions in the bill. CAHS is testifying separately on the child care provision in the bill.

Leadership Team: CAHS supports the establishment of a children in the recession leadership team to implement and coordinate an "emergency response" to children affected the recession. This team is unique because 1) it only takes action when children are affected by a recession, 2) it requires state

agencies to communicate, coordinate, and take immediate action to address the needs of children, and 3) it can be nimble and flexible.

We have suggestions to make the emergency children in the recession leadership team more effective. Legislators – both Democrats and Republicans – should be included on the leadership team. The leadership team should reach out to parents affected by the recession. Their voice must be at the table – they know first-hand how the recession is affecting their children and what policy changes would make the biggest differences in the lives of their family.

Single Point of Entry and On-line Application and Enrollment Processes: CAHS believes there should be no wrong door for a family to enter seeking support. Unfortunately, that is currently not the case. Families seeking assistance must enter multiple doors at different locations to access different services. This creates confusion and frustration for parents as they make their way through the labyrinth. Not only does it cost families time and money, it also costs the state through uncoordinated, duplicated efforts. It is hard to believe that in this technological age that Connecticut has not implemented on-line, internet-based combined-enrollment processes. People actually stand out in long lines in front of DSS offices to submit paper applications and often are turned away and told to report the next day. The Department of Social Services is working on a modernization project that will establish on-line applications. It is critical this project moves quickly along and that funding for the project is not held back. A bigger step would be to create one single on-line application for all public benefits.

Reduced Application Time: The time it takes for an application to be processed so people can enroll in SNAP, Care 4 Kids, or HUSKY and other programs is unacceptable. For SNAP, the state is supposed to process applications within 30 days of receipt. We are hearing that the application process for SNAP and Care 4 Kids is taking at least 60 days, if not more. A 60-day wait for a parent applying for Care 4 Kids jeopardizes the ability for the parent to take the job. A 60-day wait for SNAP benefits means that children are going hungry. The reason for the long delay in processing applications is two-fold: 1) lack of DSS staff to manage caseloads, and 2) processing applications by paper instead of through on-line applications. It's time for Connecticut to seriously address this long-standing problem that poses an undue hardship on struggling families.

Benefits Outreach: Community-based outreach is critical to ensure that people know about all the benefits, tax credits, and other resources that are available. Several nonprofit organizations, including CAHS, End Hunger CT! and the Hispanic Health Council, reach out to communities to make sure that eligible people enroll in SNAP. SNAP enrollment has risen dramatically – 30.8 percent between November 2008 and November 2000. The alarming increase is due to the state increasing eligibility from 133 percent to 185 percent of the poverty level and due to the many families who have lost jobs and are seeking SNAP support for the first time in their lives. Currently, 313,000 people are enrolled in SNAP.

Connecticut used to invest more into outreach for other programs such as Care 4 Kids and HUSKY. The state until recently contracted with nonprofit providers to conduct HUSKY outreach, but that money has been eliminated. Care 4 Kids outreach out in the field was eliminated several years ago. One valuable outreach tool for HUSKY outreach does remain: United Way HUSKY Infoline. HUSKY Infoline answers questions, provides assistance with applications, and helps families access health care services. In 2009, HUSKY Infoline received 60,699 income calls and made more than 44,700 outbound calls on behalf of Connecticut families. Unfortunately, the Governor proposes in her FY11 mid-term budget to eliminate HUSKY Infoline. CAHS implores the General Assembly to keep this critical outreach and referral service.



TANF Approved Work Activity: CAHS supports including attending two- and four-year degree programs as a work-approved activity under TANF. The federal government allows this as a work approved activity, but Connecticut regulations do not. There is no reason to bar a TANF client, who is able and ready to attain a college degree, from doing so as a participant in the TANF program. The more education a TANF participant attains, the higher wage that person will likely earn.

TANF Emergency Contingency Fund: This portion of the bill seeks to ensure that Connecticut maximize matching federal funds under the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund. CAHS is a member of the Governor's TANF Emergency Contingency Fund work group, which is identifying both state and private-sector funding that would qualify for either an 80 percent match or four-to-one match in federal dollars. The work group is seeking to maximize federal funding in three areas: 1) increased TANF cash assistance (the state has already submitted an application due experiencing in an increase in the TANF caseload); 2) one-time, non-recurring services falling under TANF eligible services; and 3) subsidized employment.

The TANF Emergency Contingency Fund has reached out to foundations, nonprofits, higher education, and businesses to identify previous increased funding to nonprofits that would qualify for the federal match. Moving forward, any foundation putting up funds for subsidized employment or one-time, non-recurring services could enable the receiving nonprofit to qualify for a federal four-to-one match.

Technically, Connecticut could receive as much as \$133 million in federal match funds though this number is most likely not realistic. Nonetheless, with some hard work, vision, and innovation, Connecticut could succeed in drawing down significant TANF Emergency Contingency Funds.

There is a concerted effort to extend the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund past the September 2010. The extension is critical to allow states to weed through this complicated process, identify state and local increased funding eligible for a match, and wisely design programs to spend the money in a manner that actually supports people and moves them onto a positive economic path. Without the federal extension, the language in this bill will be moot; however, if the extension passes, the bill language pushes Connecticut to maximize federal funds under this program.

We applaud the Speaker of the House for establishing the Children in the Recession Task Force, which heard from advocates about needed policy changes and held public hearings to hear from parents and children about how the recession has impacted their lives. This legislation is a product of the work of the Task Force and has the support of the Speaker of the House. We urge the Committee to vote in favor of H.B. 5360.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

