



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



Testimony of

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**Human Services Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
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Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak, Senator Markley, Representative Gibbons and members of the Human Services Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Connecticut Commission on Children in support of two bills before this committee: H.B. 5434 and Proposed H.B. 5616.

H.B. 5434, An Act Concerning Processing of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applications

The Commission on Children actively supports H.B. 5434, which we believe would greatly increase the number of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications submitted to the federal government. The impact of this legislation would be to maximize the federal dollars provided for food to eligible persons in need as well as the state's potential to receive performance bonus dollars.

This legislation takes reasonable steps within available appropriations to require the Department of Social Services to prioritize community outreach to assist persons applying for SNAP, and to make DSS staff available to provide assistance to applicants in the place where they are most needed – out in communities, not simply sitting by the phone at DSS waiting for prospective applicants to call. DSS staff would fan out to help children and families apply for SNAP at community action agencies, hospitals and community health centers.

Taking these steps to increase SNAP participation would bring needed food to thousands of children, families and other hungry persons who are eligible now for assistance but are not receiving it. It would reduce food insecurity, lower health care costs, and help children become better able to learn and succeed in school.

Maximizing SNAP participation also would provide real stimulus to the economy: According to Mark Zandi of Moody's Economy.com, each dollar provided through the food stamp program generates \$1.73 in economic activity (http://www.economy.com/dismal/article_free.asp?cid=102598).

Based on Zandi's analysis, **increasing Connecticut's SNAP annual participation from 69% to full participation of all eligible persons would yield an additional \$309.3 million in annual economic activity in our state**, including \$180 million in new federal funds coming to our state as SNAP benefits. This infusion of funds is valuable because it would feed hungry people and provide economic stimulus. In addition, a portion of this increased economic activity would result in sales, income and corporate tax revenue to the state.

On the issue of performance bonus dollars, it is essential that Connecticut improve its timeliness and accuracy of SNAP benefit processing. Performance in three areas (over and underpayments as well as improper denials) can result in bonuses or fiscal penalties.

In addition, USDA gathers information about a state's timeliness with respect to initial applications. Strong performance in this area can make a state eligible for a bonus. There are no automatic penalties for poor performance in timeliness, but USDA applies individual sanctions for poor program management.

According to federal SNAP program improvement information (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/government/program-improvement.htm>), Connecticut has a poor over payment rate (4.30) and a poor application processing timeliness rate (ranking 45th of all states plus DC).

If you look at the performance bonuses by year from 2003 to 2009, Connecticut has not received a single performance bonus under any of the categories. This is a missed opportunity for Connecticut in federal funds maximization. While Florida and many other states have reaped millions in bonuses, Connecticut has received \$0. This legislation should help Connecticut move closer to qualifying for a performance bonus in the SNAP program.

The Commission on Children strongly urges passage of H.B. 5434.

Proposed H.B. 5616, An Act Concerning Licensure of Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners

This bill would provide for statewide licensure of advanced dental hygiene practitioners by the Department of Public Health. By creating a program in which graduates of an advanced dental hygiene program could provide direct patient care in public health facilities, this legislation would improve access by low-income children and adults to quality dental care.

Oral health is a significant component of physical and social well-being. Untreated dental conditions lead to pain, interference with eating, overuse of emergency room services, poor self-esteem and lost time at school and work. Many oral diseases can be attributed to bacterial infections that, when left untreated can affect other systems of the body. Associations between

poor oral health and cardiovascular disease as well as respiratory disease have been documented.

According to *Every Smile Counts*, a 2007 report by the Department of Public Health (http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/oral_health/pdf/every_smile_counts_final_report.pdf), dental decay is a significant public health problem for Connecticut's children. Many children in Connecticut do not get the dental care they need – more than 60 percent of the state's children do not have dental sealants, an accepted clinical intervention to prevent tooth decay in molar teeth. There are significant oral health disparities in Connecticut with minority and low-income children having the highest level of dental disease and the lowest level of dental sealants.

One of the key strategies in the DPH report is to increase the number of dental providers in under-served areas. This legislation would help to meet that goal.

The Commission on Children strongly supports Proposed H.B. 5616 and urges its passage.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on these important bills to improve the lives of Connecticut children and adults.