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Statement of Brian S. Becker
State Representative for the 19th Assembly District
before the
Human Services Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
March 1, 2011
in support of
HB 5434

An Act Concerning Processing of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applications

Chairman Musto, Chairman Tercyak, Ranking Member Markley, Ranking Member Gibbons, and the other distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for making HB 5434, An Act Concerning Processing of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applications, a committee bill and for taking the time to hear testimony on it.

Last week this Committee, sitting jointly with the Appropriations Committee, received a briefing from federal experts and from the DSS Commissioner and his deputy on the state of Connecticut's SNAP program. Therefore, I will dispense with a more in-depth presentation and touch on just a few key points for you to keep in mind as you consider this bill.

SNAP benefits are funded 100% by federal dollars. Currently, only about two-thirds of those people in the State of Connecticut who are eligible to receive those dollars actually receive them. This means that one-third of those eligible are not receiving SNAP dollars – which equates to the State of Connecticut leaving approximately **\$180 million per year** on the table.

There are studies that say there is an economic multiplier effect that applies to those dollars. For every dollar received through the SNAP program, at least \$1.70 of economic activity takes place in our state. This means that if we were to achieve 100% participation in the SNAP program, we could expect more than \$300 million in economic activity each year. That's a lot of money – at least a portion of which would be taxable by the state.

Not only are we leaving all of this money behind and missing out on substantial economic activity, but, as you heard last week, the State of Connecticut is also at risk of being fined by the Feds because of DSS's high error rate and its abysmal turnaround times. The economics alone, justify making the SNAP program DSS's top priority.

When you add in the human element, it clinches the argument. Food is a basic human need. While other programs that DSS administers are also important, no program, in my mind, has a higher priority than food. No one in our state, a state which is among the wealthiest states in the wealthiest country in the world, should go to bed hungry.

It is inexcusable that DSS has allowed the SNAP program to be conducted as it has been. DSS officials sat before you last week and blamed understaffing and antiquated computer systems. When one keeps in mind that the state receives 50% reimbursement from the Feds for SNAP administration expenses, it begs the question of why the Department has failed to address these issues. I blame a lack of leadership for the current state of affairs. Strong senior managers, particularly in difficult budgetary times, prioritize tasks and projects - putting first things first.

Nothing DSS is doing could be more important than expanding outreach for the SNAP program and sufficiently staffing the program to ensure that applications and payments are timely and accurately filed and paid. That is what this bill seeks to do. I hope you will support it.

Thank you.