

# Legal Assistance Resource Center

## of Connecticut, Inc.

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### **Testimony before the Human Services Committee in support of RB 1042 – An Act Concerning a Pilot Project under the Jobs First Employment Services Program**

by Jane McNichol, Executive Director  
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I am Jane McNichol, Executive Director of the Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut, the advocacy and support center for legal services programs in the state. We represent the interests of very-low income residents of the state. LARCC is also the convener of the Welfare Working Group, a group of about 25 advocates who have monitored Connecticut's family welfare program since 1995.

**I am here to speak in support of RB 1042, which would establish a pilot program to explore better ways to assist parents striving to move from welfare to work.** This is a follow-up to SB 840 and HB 5558, which propose more comprehensive reforms to the Jobs First Employment Services Program. These bills were heard before this Committee on February 10. I will try not to repeat the information and arguments that I made in testimony on that day.

**The Jobs First Employment Services program provides assessments, case management, assistance in preparing for and finding a job, vocational education, adult basic education, subsidized employment and other support services to parents in the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program** who are required to meet state work participation rules. The JFES program served over 11,000 parents last year. This is far from a perfect system for adults with severe barriers to employment. It has always been underfunded and the strict time limits in our family welfare system make resolving serious barriers to employment difficult.

Comprehensive reform of the JFES and TFA systems would require that more of our TANF block grant and associated maintenance of effort funds be directed to these programs. This is not the year to expect increased funding. Therefore, we support and urge this Committee to support a modest pilot program for up to 100 parents which could be funded within available appropriations and could experiment with new ways of supporting parents moving into the workforce.

Essential elements of an effective JFES program would include:

- **intensive case management** to help parents identify goals, needed support services and needed training, education or experience and then to access the identified support services and training, education or experience;
- **funding to facilitate enrollment in necessary** programs offering adult basic education, skills training, post-secondary education or subsidized employment; and
- **extensions of cash assistance beyond 21 or 33 months** for families in which the parents are successfully participating in the above activities.

The most costly item in this list would be extensions of cash assistance. But if the pilot is structured to work with parents as they first enter the system, as it should be, then there will be no need for extensions beyond what is already available to families in the two years of this budget cycle.

**I urge your support of this bill so that we can begin to take some important steps toward a better welfare to work system for parents, even if we cannot do as much as we would like this year.**

Thank you for your attention to these important issues.