

**Testimony of Sarah Petela
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**Human Services Committee
In support of S. B. 1042, An Act Concerning a Pilot Project under the Jobs First
Employment Services Program, and H.B. 5434, An Act Concerning Processing of
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applications.**

March 1, 2011

Good morning Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Sarah Petela, and I am a student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here in support of Senate Bill, 1042, An Act Concerning a Pilot Project under the Jobs First Employment Services Program, and House Bill 5434, An Act Concerning Processing of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applications.

During this difficult economic time, it has become increasingly important to provide solvent fiscal solutions to the issues facing individuals, families and communities. In regards to the Jobs First Education Program, which is mandated for all recipients of cash assistance in the Temporary Family Assistance program, this means investing in intensive case management services that address the totality of barriers facing low-skilled workers in the workforce. In 2009, Connecticut invested only 3.8 percent of its total TANF/MOE funds in employment services. According to a focus group conducted by the Connecticut Association for Basic Human Needs, program participants reported that the training they received in the program failed to provide pathways to stable, full-time employment. The current employment services provided under the program are primarily focused on getting participants immediately into the workforce and not on providing participants with the education and training necessary to achieve economic stability. For the most part, program participants are employed in low-wage part-time jobs, which hinder their ability to move out of poverty.

Investing in quality job training and education is the key to helping women build needed skills. I support SB 1042, An Act Concerning a Pilot Project under the Jobs First Employment Services Program because it emphasizes long term poverty reduction and sustainable employment, rather than short term job acquisition. This bill provides program participants with intensive case management, and access to quality education and training. Similar programs, which have been enacted throughout the country, have helped to move participants into sustainable employment. The Pennsylvania KEYS Program, for example, provides participants with access to associate degree programs, one-year certificates, and credit bearing programs which lead towards the acquisition of marketable skills. In 2010, the average hourly wage rate of a KEYS graduate was \$14.77, as compared to \$8.00 for former and current participants in other states. Programs which provide meaningful opportunities will offer pathways to success.

I support House Bill 5434, An Act Concerning Processing of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applications. In these dismal economic times, hunger is a growing reality facing families throughout the state. FoodShare and the Connecticut Food Bank, the two organizations responsible for distributing food in all eight counties, report that they are only able to meet one-third of the need. According to the Commission on Children 2010 RBA Report, one out of five Connecticut children under the age of 12 – 102,000 children – is hungry or at risk of hunger. With more families than ever turning to aid to avoid hunger, it is imperative that families in need of assistance be able to access the SNAP/Food Stamp benefits that they need to survive. At the present time, Connecticut's SNAP/Food Stamp program is failing to meet this need. According to James Arena-DeRosa, Northeast Regional Administrator for the United States Department of Agriculture, this past year Connecticut was ranked 53rd in the nation because of its negative-error rate. This number reflects the total amount of cases wrongly denied or terminated in the Connecticut SNAP program. What is more, only 67 percent of eligible SNAP recipients are currently receiving benefits, meaning that approximately 33 percent of families are not receiving the benefits they need to become food secure. I support this bill because it will make sure that SNAP applications are processed within a timely manner, and because it ensures that there will be a sufficient number of existing employees at DSS allocated to make sure that applications are processed in a timely and accurate manner. Lastly, I support families being able to complete applications at outreach centers throughout the state because it makes economic sense. I agree that Department of Social Service workers, who are employed within community action agencies, hospitals, and community health centers, will be able to provide families in need of nutritional support with quality services in convenient locations.

Thank you for your time and attention.