



**March 17, 2011 Public Hearing Testimony before the  
Connecticut General Assembly Human Services Committee**

**Raised Senate Bill No. 1145: AN ACT CONCERNING OUTREACH BY  
COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES FOR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICANTS**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members:

My name is Edith Pollock Karsky. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), which is the state association of Connecticut's twelve Community Action Agencies. CAAs are the local organizations designated by the state and federal governments as their official partners in helping families avoid financial crisis, and equipping them through comprehensive case management to regain their financial footing if poverty does strike. We administer benefit programs to more than 300,000 people annually, empowering families and strengthening communities in every Connecticut city and town.

Let me begin by thanking the Committee for raising Senate Bill No. 1145: AN ACT CONCERNING OUTREACH BY COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES FOR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICANTS. The Connecticut Association for Community Action supports this legislation because the need to connect our most vulnerable residents to effective services has never been more urgent. And it's always the right time to collaborate and innovate where we can to shape a better future for *all* Connecticut families.

Why does this legislation deserve the Committee's support? First, the time is right. As this committee knows, and as has been widely reported, the State of Connecticut may face sanctions from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the federal agency that administers SNAP, because of the State's underperformance in terms of processing SNAP applications in a timely manner and providing correct benefit levels.<sup>1</sup> There are several reasons for the situation, but the point is that this legislation contains a workable step in the right direction.

The time is right, too, because with a new governor and new leadership at the State Department of Social Services (DSS), and particularly in light of our state's fiscal struggles, there is an opportunity to reexamine the way DSS operates: for the good of the State, DSS customers, and all Connecticut taxpayers.

Second, Connecticut's Community Action Agencies constitute an established, flexible, accountable statewide human service infrastructure. We report to the State and the

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<sup>1</sup> Becker, Arielle Levin. "State could face sanctions for food stamp problems" February 23, 2011, available at <http://ctmirror.org> (retrieved March 15, 2011).

federal government, and we are held to high standards of accountability through the federal Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system. We give the State the biggest 'bang' for its buck precisely because of this position as a unique, existing, flexible resource. And it's partnerships such as this one proposed for SNAP outreach and enrollment that allow the State to invest public dollars wisely in Connecticut's economic recovery. With the appropriate level of SNAP administrative resources, fifty percent (50%) of which are provided by the federal government, we will achieve success in serving residents better through this effort.

For an example of cost effective and efficient service delivery we need look no further than the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) operated by the CAA network. Our agencies process over 130,000 household applications each energy season, **certifying over 110,000 homes** for heating assistance.<sup>2</sup> Recently we were audited for error rates and found to have a three percent (3%) overall error rate—or a ninety-seven percent (97%) accuracy rate: definitely considered best practices in private, public, and nonprofit sectors.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, when we queried our CEAP software database we discovered that approximated forty-three percent (43%) of homes eligible for CEAP were not receiving SNAP. So, right here in our agencies we have a large number of individuals who need this benefit, but we currently are not allowed to provide this critical service. This obvious need and gap in service delivery should be addressed immediately and our agencies are ready and willing to work with DSS to do so.

Let me be very clear that we support this legislation because it does not infringe upon the role of DSS, but rather expands upon our established partnership with the agency. While innovative efforts are underway at the Department, the reported case load is more than 1,700 per DSS case worker.<sup>4</sup> This legislation will help get the job done for the people of Connecticut in a way that respects the State workforce and helps to maximize the federal dollars flowing into our state.

Finally, we would ask the Committee to change "may" to "shall" in Section 1, line 4. This change reflects the wording of Committee Bill No. 5434: AN ACT CONCERNING PROCESSING OF SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICATIONS, and would more strongly promote interagency collaboration in closing Connecticut's "SNAP gap."

Again, thank you for this opportunity. As our state faces multiple challenges, Raised Bill No. 1145 is one initiative that will work for Connecticut's families *and* economy.

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<sup>2</sup> DSS CEAP/CHAP "Application Data – September 1, 2010" Spreadsheet

<sup>3</sup> DSS review 2010

<sup>4</sup> Becker, Arielle Levin. "State could face sanctions for food stamp problems" February 23, 2011, available at <http://ctmirror.org> (retrieved March 15, 2011).