



March 17, 2011

Re: S.B. No. 1145 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING OUTREACH BY COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES FOR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICANTS.

Thanks to the outreach efforts of End Hunger CT, Foodshare and local agencies like ours that see clients every day, we have more people receiving SNAP than ever before in CT – and people in need keep coming to us for help. The problem is - DSS does not have enough people to process the applications in a timely fashion and that has a huge impact on our agency and on our clients in dire need of food assistance.

Gifts of Love provides basic needs – food, clothing, furniture, household items, energy assistance – but we are most concerned about the need for our food pantry program. Although in order to qualify for our program, in most cases, someone in the household must be working, we are still seeing a huge increase in need. With the number of households going from 2 incomes to one because of recent layoffs, many families have nowhere else to turn but Gifts of Love and their local food pantries.

It is hard enough for the unemployed and others struggling financially to figure out how to obtain social services like SNAP, WIC, counseling and utility assistance for the first time. It can be even harder in the suburbs. There, many residents, including middle-class people unversed in the welfare system, have trouble making use of the shelters, government offices and nonprofit agencies that are less visible than in cities. Gifts of Love is responding to this concern and trying to assist as many people as possible at our Avon office with a wide range of services.

We are now trained to assist people with SNAP applications. Unfortunately in some cases it may take weeks for our clients' applications to be processed and for them to receive the help they need. We can't certify applications but we can make the process easier for those that qualify for assistance. But more focus needs to be placed on those that CAN certify the applications. Our clients in crisis can't wait for the backlog to clear – they need food and have to visit their local pantries more often as they wait for state assistance. This puts additional stress on our agencies.

Non-profits are busy doing outreach, more emphasis needs to focus on DSS's ability to process the applications and qualify our clients that we have reached.

Sincerely

Diana Goode
Executive Director