

Human Services Committee, March 17, 2011
Testimony submitted by Lucy Potter, Attorney
Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Raised Bill N. 1145, An Act Concerning Outreach by Community Action Agencies for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Applicants.

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid and have represented many clients who seek cash and medical help from DSS.

This bill would designate community actions agencies and other CBO's to publicize the availability of the SNAP program and to accept and screen applications. Presumably, it is motivated in part by the understanding that every \$5 in SNAP benefits generates \$9.20 in community spending. This is a well intentioned measure, but I believe it will do little to relieve the gridlock at DSS or expand SNAP participation. Every application that a community agency takes will have to be completed by a DSS worker. While a streamlined entry from the CBO's to DSS might help, frankly, it is hard to imagine how such a concept would actually get operationalized given present constraints. Community action agencies are already overwhelmed trying to assist clients with faxing materials to DSS and dogging lost paperwork and overdue applications.

As Commissioner Starkowski testified on February 11, DSS now wrongly denies 26% of the SNAP applications (actually an improvement from the low of 36% in March.) As he said, each of these denials typically results in another application soon after. This means, of the 16,000 SNAP applications that DSS gets each month, 4000 will be denied and require a subsequent application. In other words, 4000 needless applications each month result from DSS's dysfunctionality. I believe the present community outreach efforts don't generate this many applications in an entire year.

I know this is a familiar refrain, but DSS is broken. The public cannot reliably access the place that is the last resort when people get sick and lose jobs. It is heartening to see the Malloy administration recognize the need to replace the Eligibility Management System, but that is several years down the road. DSS needs sufficient staffing, improved management and an adequate phone system. These fundamentals cannot wait while the automated system is being rebuilt.

Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.

999 Asylum Avenue, 3Fl. Hartford, CT 06105-2465 • Tel: 860. 541. 5000 • Fax: 860. 541.5050 • TTY: 860. 541.5069

• www.ghla.org

