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My name is Krista Ostaszewski and I am the SNAP Outreach Coordinator for Foodshare. Foodshare is the heart of greater Hartford's fight against hunger. Serving as the region's food bank, Foodshare works to distribute food each day to a network of nearly 300 local partners to help feed our hungry neighbors. Through these programs, Foodshare served 128,000 people, including 50,000 children, last year. I am writing this testimony in response to SB 1145, AN ACT CONCERNING OUTREACH BY COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES FOR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPLICANTS. Foodshare believes this bill is unnecessary. Currently Foodshare, in partnership with End Hunger CT! and other organizations work on increasing SNAP participation rates through direct outreach.

Foodshare's mission is "we will work toward ending hunger as part of the overall community effort to alleviate poverty in greater Hartford". We work toward this goal by distributing food, but we also work to support federal and state nutrition programs that also provide food to families in need.

The Supplemental Nutrition Program currently helps over 300,000 Connecticut residents have access to healthy and nutritious foods. The program has proven to be one of the most effective and efficient ways of ending hunger in America. As the food bank for most of the northern region of Connecticut, we understand the power SNAP has as a hunger-fighting program. Just a 5% increase in enrollment of the program would provide more than 12 million pounds of food. That is more than what Foodshare distributes in a full year!

It is essential for struggling families in Connecticut to have access to SNAP along with other food resources, such as pantries and our mobile Foodshare program, to make ends meet. As part of the initiative to ensure that this is a possibility for every family in our service area, Foodshare has decided to make SNAP outreach an organizational priority. We currently have 20 trained SNAP outreach volunteers that work in the greater Hartford area to help residents apply for SNAP. We screen clients for eligibility into the program and also assist in the application process. SNAP volunteers work at a variety of different locations; including pantries, community centers and even town social services offices. With 8 on-going locations, volunteers work on a weekly or monthly basis at these locations to assist interested clients. Along with these ongoing sites we also host one day events. These events include health fairs, tax preparation sites and even energy assistance sites such as CRT. Collaborating with the public and private sector has proven to be a worthy opportunity to increase participation rates for SNAP.

Along with training volunteers and agencies in SNAP outreach, and creating outreach locations with easy access in mind for clients, Foodshare also works with the other outreach organizations

throughout the state, such as End Hunger CT!, Hispanic Health Council and Connecticut Association for Human Services to collaborate and address the over arching issues around SNAP.

Getting outreach organizations to increase participation in the program is not the issue; organizations are already doing this work and doing it well. The problem lies in the hands of the Department of Social Services. Hundreds of applications are being faxed, mailed, e-faxed and dropped off to the Department of Social Services each day. The problem is these applications are not being processed quickly enough. The federal government mandates that SNAP applications are processed within 30 days. Currently Foodshare is seeing applications take up to 60 days to be processed! This timeliness issue is only supported by the recent reporting's of the USDA that ranks Connecticut with one of the lowest quality ratings in the nation. We should be ashamed. Not only is Connecticut being threatened with fines from the federal government but Connecticut families are also going hungry because of these timeliness issues!

On a daily basis I receive calls from clients that submitted their application over a month ago to the Department of Social Services and simply just never heard back. They express their frustration and sadness, as yet another day has to go by where they have to struggle to put food on the table. Access to food should not be a struggle. But unfortunately with the current state of the Department of Social Services that is exactly what is happening.

The system in place to help those in need is broken. Non profits and advocacy organizations throughout the state have been working for years to make SNAP accessible for all. But that is not where the problem lies. The issues at the Department of Social Services range from being under staffed, to having to use out of date materials and an out of date EMS system. These issues have created a bottleneck effect where all of the private sector's hard work gets held up. Without forward movement to eliminate the issues at the Department of Social Services, everything else; outreach for SNAP, advocacy around hunger issues and families in need are just simply stuck in place.

Foodshare gratefully appreciates our legislator's time and energy wrestling with these issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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