

March 1, 2011

Testimony on the following bills:

**H.B. 1042 – AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROJECT UNDER THE JOBS FIRST EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM**

Submitted by: Wayne Valaitis, Vice President of Operations, FSW, Inc., formerly Family Services Woodfield

Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Wayne Valaitis, I am Vice President of Operations, FSW, Inc., *formerly Family Services Woodfield*, a family services program that provides human services in the greater Bridgeport areas. One of the programs that I supervise is the WorkSkills program which provides educational and employment training to Jobs First eligible participants.

I am here today to support House Bill# 1042 which is recommending that a pilot program be developed to provide intensive case management, assistance in accessing needed support services, and funding to facilitate participation in these support services.

I have been working in the non-profit field for more than 20 years and in Adult Education Workforce Development for the past 7 years.

It is during those 7 years that we have been providing employment skills training under the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program. I would first like to state that this would be a fantastic opportunity to provide wrap around services to individuals participating in the Jobs First Employment Service Program. This Act would develop a truly comprehensive employment preparation program.

There are a some supports that I do not see mentioned in this Act, I am assuming that they are already in place for JFES eligible participants. But, I do want to mention that quality childcare and transportation assistance are critical supports for JFES participants. They are provided typically for a participant taking part in employment training, so I am assuming they will be part of the support services being offered.

The other issue is regarding Case Management. In the raised Bill, stated in Section 1. (c), "the support services identified as needed by the program participants through the provision of case management services by the Department of Social Services and the Labor Department ...". While I have nothing but the utmost respect for the Case Management provided by DSS and the Department of Labor, I would suggest that Case Management for this pilot be provided by the training provider that will be working with the participants.

Over that past 7 years working with JFES participants I have seen the relationships that are developed between our program staff and participants. The strong bonds that are developed lend themselves very well to Case Management. Our training staff becomes mentors for our participants and these relationships remain strong for years after participants have left our program and enter employment. Countless participants come back a year or more later and get help updating their resumes and accessing other training services. Some of the other attributes for training providers conducting case management include:

- Smaller case loads
- Closer access to community resources
- Ability to conduct home visits
- Meet during non-traditional hours

I would strongly suggest that the pilot be a multi-year program. With funding that will remain in place beyond the first year of the pilot program. While there can certainly be a report as outlined in Section 1. (c). The strongest outcome report would be after a second year of service is provided. Quite honestly it is nearly impossible to take a person that is receiving benefits under the temporary family assistance program and get them into a living wage job (\$41,000) in a 12 month program. But, achieving that wage with a program that is available for 18-24 months is possible. In a longer program we can provide additional training through distance learning opportunities that are available, while participants are involved with subsidized or unsubsidized work experience. These trainings would lead to additional certifications or credentials. Couple these additional credentials with the unsubsidized work experience for 12 or more months to a resume and our participants would be very marketable for better employment opportunities.

Some of the other positive outcomes to providing the wrap around services suggested in this pilot project would include:

- Supporting participants to strengthen their,
  - Life coping skills
  - Literacy
  - Self-esteem
  - Financial literacy
  - Decision making skills
  - Parenting skills

By adding these components to a JFES program that is going to allow additional educational activities, you will finally be giving program providers the tools needed to transform the employment possibilities for participants receiving temporary family assistance. This would be a transformation that would end a life of dependence and replace with a life of self sufficiency and achievement.

I encourage you to support this pilot project for JFES participants.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

