

Council 4 AFSCME Testimony – Appropriations Committee – 2/17/12

Good evening Chairman Harp, Chairman Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Brian Anderson. I am a lobbyist for Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 public and nonprofit employees, including many of the state workers at the Department of Social Services, Department of Children and Families and in nonprofit human services agencies

Please restore funding for services and staff at the Department of Social Services. This staff serves as the bridge between poor families and the services they need. Governor Rowland slashed these positions to the bone during the 2003 layoff crisis. They have not been restored. Now eligibility worker caseloads for services such as Foodstamps and Medicaid are as high as 1700 cases per according to DSS data, when they should be significantly lower (no more than 400). Many of the families receiving DSS aid are working families that are employed at full time hours. We also urge you to not privatize out more DSS work. Accountability, transparency and quality are lost with privatization. Savings are not achieved as we saw with the Maximus day care payment contract that doubled in cost in one year and completely botched the payments. Living wage jobs get turned into low wage jobs, and then the workers who hold them in addition to soliciting for people to apply for DSS benefits, qualify for them themselves.

The cut in the DCF personal services budget is quite large. We are hearing of instances where staff are working at 100% of caseload capacity or over 100, as defined by the court monitor.

Also, please consider the plight of nonprofit workers in DSS, DCF and other state contracting human services nonprofits. They have not had a COLA in five years, yet their cost of living continues to rise. We thank Governor Malloy for proposing the 1% COLA increase, but as the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits has also requested, we ask that this be given on July 1.

Council 4 understands the difficult position that the state finds itself in because of the economic crisis. But, we believe that every step necessary should be taken to avoid cutting services for poor people, cutting assistance to working families trying to access respite or health care and cutting COLAs for people on public assistance. Our richest citizens and successful corporations have received immense tax cuts from the federal and state government in the past few years and could stand to contribute a portion of that in taxes for the common good. Economists and other experts all agree that in a time of recession and economic crisis, we need to strengthen public services and expand the middle class by investing in programs and people. We cannot cut our way out of this crisis. We have to invest in services and we have to invest in the middle class, so people feel good again about spending money in their communities.

Thank you for your consideration.