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Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Appropriations and Human Services Committee, July 24, 2012
Testimony submitted by Lucy Potter, Attorney
Greater Hartford Legal Aid

1115 Waiver to restrict eligibility under the Medicaid for Low Income Adults (LIA) or HUSKY D program. Oppose

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid and have represented many clients who seek cash and medical help from DSS. I am also one of the attorneys in Briggs v. Bremby, a federal class action lawsuit that challenges DSS's timeliness in processing food stamp applications.

Connecticut commendably led the way in taking up the opportunity for federal Medicaid funding for what was formerly the state-funded SAGA medical program. With this waiver, Connecticut now seeks to restrict eligibility under the resulting LIA program. I have particular concern about the impact that imposing an asset limit would have on DSS's case processing.

The most recent reports we have show that 63% of the Medicaid applications that DSS processed were overdue for the month of June. DSS simply does not have the capacity to review assets in 70,000 LIA cases in 60 days. Review of assets, or even the lack of assets, can be complicated and time-consuming. Connecticut along with many other states recently eliminated an asset limit from the food stamp program--a change motivated, in part, to reduce the errors that result from these complex determinations.

The worker time needed for asset eligibility determination in the LIA program will of course have a spill over effect in all the other programs as well, further delaying food stamp, TFA and other cases. I mentioned the delay in the Medicaid program. The delay in Connecticut's food stamp application processing is the worst in the nation: only 61% of food stamp applications were processed on time for the 6 months ending December, 2011. DSS has plans to improve this, but the implementation date keeps slipping further out. Frankly, it seems unlikely there will be a system in place that could handle the volume needed to implement the changes, without disrupting processing in other programs, before January, 2014. At that point, the program will be fully federally funded.

I also question the proposal to impute parental income to adults between the ages of 19 and 26 who live with their parents. A parent has no legal liability for a child older than 21. There might be superficial logic to this rule, based on the expansion of private medical coverage to this group. But the imputed income rules will disqualify these young adults regardless of whether private insurance is an option.

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