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**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
Re. Governor Malloy's Department of Social Services Budget Proposal
February 17, 2012**

Submitted by Liz Dupont-Diehl, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services
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Good afternoon, Senator Harp and Representative Walker and members of the committee. My name is Liz Dupont-Diehl and I am the Policy Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS seeks to end poverty and empower all families to build a secure economic future. CAHS produces research and analysis on child poverty and other issues as needed to drive advocacy, and we work for policies that create fair opportunity for economic success for all families. We are the Annie E. Casey Kids Count partner for the state of Connecticut and we produce regular analyses of child poverty, both within and throughout Connecticut and nationally. CAHS also operates a number of programs to help people become self-sufficient, such as SNAP benefit outreach, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, financial literacy classes and Earned Benefits Outreach, which helps people connect with eligible benefits to help them access health care, meet basic needs and become self-sufficient.

Today we would like to focus on several areas of the Governor's budget proposal.

The first is a pilot that would allow Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) participants to pursue their GED or high school diploma as part of allowable activities. Being able to get a high school diploma is critical for **anyone** to get a job, and a DOL/DSS working group has come up with a plan make that possible for hundreds of people in the program. **We oppose the cut of \$150,000 for the small JFES pilot mandated in last year's budget. We also oppose at least in part the cut of \$9 million in cash assistance.** There are no proposed changes in TFA policy but some of that \$9 million should be used to fund the pilot projects, if DOL and DSS determine that additional funding is needed.

The second is Care for Kids, the state's child care voucher program for working parents an important program for both its ability to provide high-quality care to young children and for its ability to allow parents to participate in the workforce. We applaud the Governor's focus on and investment in early childhood education in this budget. We wholeheartedly support the \$6.8 million dollar increase to Care4kids,. This is a slight adjustment of \$136,000 over the originally appropriated FY 2013 amount. We would like to see these additional dollars used to increase rates to providers. Connecticut is one of three states that have not increased our provider rates since 2001. Providers are employers and need to be able to cover real costs to be contributors to the state's economy. This small increase in rates will also allow providers to maintain and enhance the experience of the children in their care.

Finally, we are concerned with the proposed cut of \$692,000 to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, providing food assistance to legal immigrants who have not been in the country for more than five years. Good nutrition is critical to family health and stability and economic success. In addition, many of these recipients have young children and we all know the impact of poverty and poor nutrition at a young age on a child's future chances. Good nutrition at a young age promotes optimal learning at critical times and a lifetime of good health.

We appreciate the Governor's commitment to maintain basic needs assistance and services to Connecticut's low-income residents. His focus on education reform in particular shows a recognition that Connecticut's areas of unequal opportunity need to be addressed, and foresight and commitment to create the lasting and positive structure needed to create and sustain healthy people and communities. We point out that children must come from healthy families, and that the stress experienced by economic instability and poverty can have a severe and lasting impact on children. Allowing JFES participants to get meaningful education critical to both their individual success and also to their long-term economic viability, and their ability to provide a stable and nurturing home life for their children. A small amount we spend today helping a TFA recipient get her GED will yield a **tremendous** return on investment in just a few short years as her earning power increases -- and the benefit to parents and their children will only compound with time.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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