END HUNGER CONNECTICUT!
Making Room at the Table

Testimony before the Human Services Committee
on
SB 396, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL SERVICES;
H.B. No. 5450 (RAISED) AN ACT ESTABLISHING A BASIC HEALTH PROGRAM
and
HB 5482, AN ACT EXPANDING THE CONGREGATE MEALS PROGRAM FOR THE ELDERLY
March 13, 2012

Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization. As such we do a significant outreach and application assistance for the federal food programs. I am here today to support HB 5482, An Act Expanding the Congregate Meals Program for the Elderly, HB 5450, An Act Establishing a Basic Health Care System and to comment on SB 396, An Act Concerning the Establishment of Community-Based Social Services.

An Act Expanding the Congregate Meals Program:

Senior congregate meal sites are often a life line for our elderly. There are approximately 200 congregate sites in Connecticut. The meal sites are in senior centers, housing facilities and community settings. The meals include deliveries to the homebound or isolated older adults. The meals symbolize nourishment in so many ways; those with little money can eat a healthy meal and socialization. Additionally, these sites and the deliveries to the homebound allow for unobtrusive safety checks.

For some older adults, because they have subsidized elderly housing, their maximum SNAP (or food stamp) benefit is a mere $16.00 a month. There may not be much left on the weekend to eat. Adding an additional day would be incredibly helpful for so many who use the program.

End Hunger Connecticut! is partnering with AARP-CT and the AARP Foundation to reach out to older adults in the state for SNAP. Our current outreach advocates have ongoing appointments at senior centers, and we work in concert with the DSS bus to prepare older adults so to be interviewed right away, and get on the program.

We strongly urge passage of HB 5482.

An Act Concerning the Establishment of Community-Based Social Services

This legislation will affect 14 cities in Connecticut: Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, Greenwich, Hamden, Hartford, Manchester, Meriden, New Britain, New Haven, Norwalk, Stamford, Waterbury and West Hartford. A pilot may show us that the municipalities that are already stretched to capacity, particularly in the large cities, will have difficulty taking this on. I worry that the problems that we currently see at DSS will only be expanded on a smaller scale by adding one more layer of bureaucracy.

There are so many people in areas in the state that cannot get benefits because they live in the rural areas and there isn't adequate transportation. In fact we are partnering with DSS and SDE in a pilot program, financed

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by the USDA, to give SNAP benefits to families in eastern Connecticut in addition to summer meals program. For many of these families they live too far away from, or cannot get to, an open site to receive a summer meal. The communities that would be able to participate in the pilot have grocery stores, food pantries, and other assistance available to them that those in the rural communities do not.

I ask you to take care the passage of this legislation does not cause another area in need in the state to lose assistance.

An Act Establishing a Basic Health Care System:

End Hunger Connecticut! supports the establishment of a basic health care system for those between 135% - 180% of the federal poverty level. Many people come to us for SNAP benefits and they are over the income limit yet they are not able to afford food. The cost of health care can debilitate a family or an individual. The time to act is now, and it is also the time that we can save the state money, as well as assuring our Connecticut residents are well taken care of so they can work and build our communities.

Please vote to send HB 5450 to the floor.

Thank you.