

**Testimony of Lisa P. Sementilli, Deputy Director**

RE: S.B. No. 209, AN ACT INCREASING EDUCATIONAL INCENTIVES IN THE JOBS FIRST  
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM

**Before the Human Services Committee  
March 1, 2012**

Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 209. *The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness supports the expansion of the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) pilot to additional low income parents* in order to support family economic self-sufficiency and prevent and reduce homelessness in Connecticut.

Allowing vocational training or continuing education as allowable activities for our state Temporary Assistance to Needy Families plan makes good economic sense. The pilot will increase access to adult basic education, vocational skills training, and post-secondary education for participants by extending eligibility for cash assistance benefits. Families enrolled in such training programs often need additional income support during the time they are in training, so they can remain stable and become better earners after the program. For this reason, we also support the additional extension of the time limit. CCEH supports an improved Jobs First Employment Services program that:

- Emphasizes poverty reduction and sustainable employment, rather than short-term job acquisition. (In order to do this, Connecticut needs intensive case management and more flexible time limits.)
- expands education and training options.

S.B. 209 is a low-cost and important first step toward achieving these goals. It makes participation in the pilot an allowable activity that can be part of a parent's employability plan, and provides up to two six-month extensions to families who have complied with program requirements (and have not exceeded 60 months receiving cash assistance and are not earning more than the federal poverty level).

Already, many families are poor enough to get two 6-month extensions. This provision will just ensure that parents entering the pilot would have extensions available if the parents need more than 21 months to earn a high school diploma. Vocational education and adult basic education are already provided within current appropriations. It is also possible to get federal support for such training.

Why is this program relevant for homeless families? Homeless families and those on TANF experience the same employment barriers (especially access to childcare and transportation). Many women in shelters have also reached the end of their time limits.

While there are many contributing factors to homelessness, primary among these are inadequate income, unemployment and the high cost of housing. Numerous studies have found that homeless families typically have incomes under fifty percent of the poverty level.<sup>1</sup> *For a family of three, this equates to an income under \$9,200 per year.*

- More than 13,000 individuals used Connecticut emergency and transitional housing programs last year. *And an estimated 40,000 families are "doubled up" (staying with family or friend for economic reasons) in Connecticut.*
- Only a third of female single parents in Connecticut's emergency shelters reported receiving TANF. Among Hispanic/Latino emergency shelter users, over half (52%; n=403) reported having 'No Financial Resources,' whereas 45% (n=1382) non-Hispanic/Latino respondents reported a complete lack of income. *(CT PIT 2010)*

We also oppose the Governor's proposed cuts to the JFES pilot and TANF. Providing opportunities for parents to earn enough to be self-sufficient reduces the need for on-going state funded housing subsidies. We need both subsidies AND income supports for the lowest income families.

As noted in previous testimony, we are also urging the Human Services and Appropriations Committees to consider additional resources for rental assistance and child care for families in shelter who are looking for housing and work. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness, "2010 Policy Guide" Washington, DC: July 2010.