

Legal Assistance Resource Center

❖ of Connecticut, Inc. ❖

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Testimony before the Human Services Committee in support of RB 209 – An Act Increasing Educational Incentives in the Jobs First Employment Services Program

by Jane McNichol, Executive Director
March 1, 2012

Good afternoon. I am **Jane McNichol**, Executive Director of the Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut, the advocacy and support center for legal services programs in the state. We represent the interests of very-low income residents of the state. LARCC also convenes the Welfare Working Group, a group of about 25 advocates on welfare issues. Since 1996, the Welfare Working Group has monitored the federal TANF program and the state's family welfare program and its impact on low-income families with children in the state.

I am here to speak in support of RB 209, which would establish a pilot program to provide vocational education and adult basic education leading to the attainment of a high school diploma for 1,000 Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) participants.

This proposal builds on the smaller pilot program that was mandated by the legislature last year and on the recommendations of a work group convened by the Department of Labor last summer to examine the JFES program. The proposal for a pilot program serving 1,000 JFES participants is modeled on the I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education Skills Training) model implemented in Washington state.

The JFES program is the part of Connecticut's family welfare/TANF program that provides case management and work-related programs and supports to parents in families receiving cash assistance (Temporary Family Assistance of TFA) who are required to engage in work activities.

There are about 7,500 participants in the JFES program at any one time; about 16,000 people participate in the program in the course of a year. The goals of the JFES program are to enable TFA participants, through employment, to become independent from cash assistance within 21 months, to remain employed and independent of TFA and to ensure that the federally established participation rates are met. These are sometimes conflicting goals.

JFES participants face many barriers to employment. The Department of Labor produces a monthly update on JFES activities, called *At-A-Squint*. A copy of the January At-A-Squint is attached to my testimony. According to the January, 2012, *At-A-Squint*, 45% of JFES participants had not gone beyond 11th grade in education. Overall, DOL estimates that 49% of JFES participants lack a high school diploma or equivalent credential.

In addition to lack of a high school diploma, barriers to employment identified when individuals enter JFES include lack of transportation (76%), lack of child care (57%), limited work history (11%), lack of English language proficiency (9%).

Despite these significant barriers, 42.6% of JFES participants are engaged only in "job search" activities. Job search activities do not include education or training. Both the pilot proposed in this bill and the smaller pilot program passed last year are attempts by Connecticut to address the need for more education and training in the JFES program.

There are several necessary elements to a program that emphasizes education or training in the JFES program. These elements are incorporated in SB 209.

- The education and training activities must be incorporated in the JFES participants "employability plan" so that participation constitutes compliance with Connecticut state program rules. In some cases, these activities will not match the federal definition of a work activity – but Connecticut is not required to have, and does not have, all JFES participants in activities that meet that definition.
- In some cases, an education or training program may extend past the participant's 21-month time limit. The Connecticut extension rules need to be adjusted to ensure that a pilot participant starting an education and training program is able to complete that program.

Finally, I am concerned that SB 209, as written, amends the statute that establishes the 100-person pilot adopted in the 2011 session. This pilot is being pursued and is not in conflict with the new pilot being proposed. The smaller pilot should not be repealed; the larger pilot should be added in separate statutory language.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. I urge your support of the pilot program proposed in SB 209.

Employment Barriers At Registration*

	#	%
Transportation	6,093	76%
Child Care	4,571	57%
No HS Diploma	1,917	24%
Limited Work History	852	11%
Language	742	9%
Housing	821	10%
Low Math/Reading Skills	219	3%
Health Issues	263	3%
Lack of Credentials	449	6%
Criminal History	335	4%
Personal/Family Issues	158	2%
Legal Issues	138	2%
Domestic Violence	158	2%
Behavioral Health Issues	187	2%
Substance Abuse	85	1%
Learning Disability	128	2%

Incidents of Employment Barriers At Registration*

	#	%
No Barriers	916	11.5%
1 Barrier	1,563	19.6%
2 Barriers	2,675	33.5%
3 Barriers	1,654	20.7%
4 or More Barriers	1,179	14.8%
Totals:	7,987	100%

Time-Limited Months Elapsed

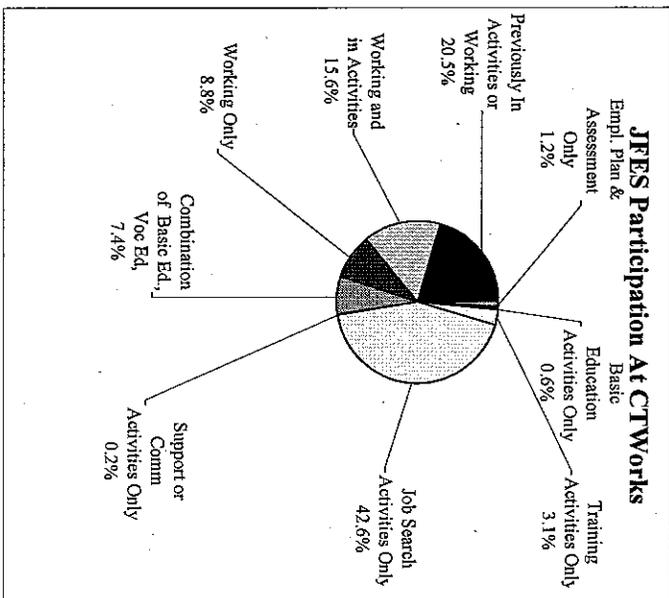
# of Months	#	%
0-2	534	6.7%
3-12	3,199	40.0%
13-18	1,694	21.2%
19-21	778	9.7%
22-27	973	12.2%
28-40	788	9.9%
>40	25	0.3%

Participants In Extensions

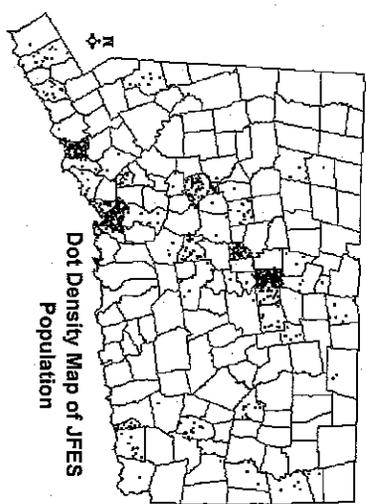
	#	%
November '11	1,821	22.5%
December '11	1,803	22.4%
January '12	1,783	22.3%

JFES Participation At CTWorks

	#	%
Empl. Plan & Assessment Only	94	1.2%
Basic Education Activities Only	45	0.6%
Training Activities Only	246	3.1%
Job Search Activities Only	3,401	42.6%
Support or Comm Activities Only	18	0.2%
Combination of Basic Ed., Voc Ed., Job Search, or Support Service	595	7.4%
Working Only	706	8.8%
Working and in Activities	1,242	15.6%
Previously In Activities or Working	1,640	20.5%
Totals:	7,987	100%



NOTES:
 * "Employment Barriers At Registration" and "Incidents of Employment Barriers At Registration" represent the number of barriers identified by JFES case managers in developing participants' employment plans and do not necessarily reflect the total number of current employment barriers.



AT - A - SQUINT

Jobs First Employment Services

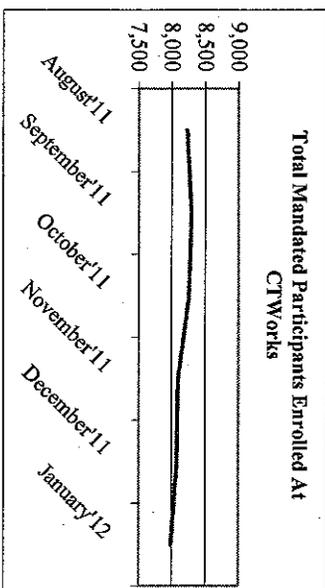
Participants Served by CTWorks

January 2012

A publication from the
 Connecticut Department of Labor
 Performance and Accountability
 Phone: (860) 263-6740 Fax: (860) 263-6216
 Welfare-To-Work Unit
 Phone: (860) 263-6789 Fax: (860) 263-6579

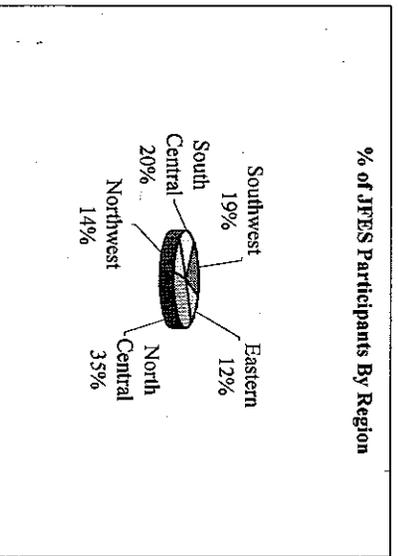
Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) Time-Limited Participants By Month

Enrolled For Services At CTWorks	Total
August'11	8,227
September'11	8,293
October'11	8,259
November'11	8,092
December'11	8,067
January'12	7,987
FY12 (Jul 1 - Jun 30)	12,677
	13,801



JFES Participants By Region

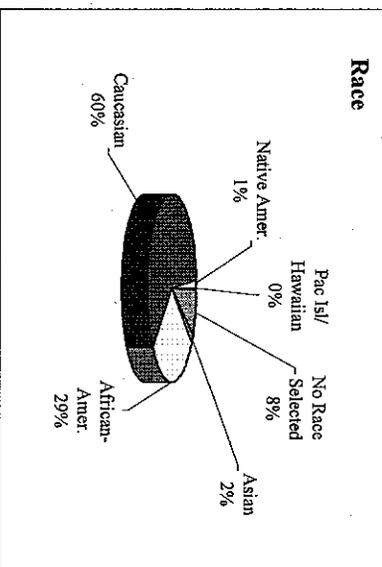
January 2012	YTD
Eastern	933
North Central	2,826
Northwest	1,087
South Central	1,593
Southwest	1,548
Totals:	7,987



Race & Ethnicity

(Total may not = 100%, clients may choose more than one race or none at all)

Race	Hispanic
Asian	132
African-Amer.	2,422
Caucasian	4,904
Native Amer.	104
Pac Isl/Hawaiian	30
No Race Selected	662
Totals:	7,987



Gender

Female	# 6,654	% 83.3%
Male	# 1,333	% 16.7%

Age

16-18	# 127	% 1.6%
19-21	# 1,586	% 19.9%
22-29	# 3,526	% 44.1%
30-39	# 1,829	% 22.9%
40-49	# 762	% 9.5%
50-59	# 151	% 1.9%
60+	# 6	% 0.1%

Highest Grade Completed

Grade Level	#	%
0 or Unknown	1,241	15.5%
1-11	2,332	29.2%
12	3,422	42.8%
13-15	806	10.1%
16+	186	2.3%
Totals:	7,987	100%

Total Employed & % of Region

January 2012

Region	#	%
Eastern	254	27.2%
North Central	685	24.2%
Northwest	282	25.9%
South Central	396	24.9%
Southwest	331	21.4%
Totals:	1,948	24.4%

Wages

Wage Range	#	%
< \$8.25	21	1%
\$8.25 - \$10.00	1,318	79%
\$10.01 - \$15.00	307	18%
\$15.01 - \$20.00	23	1%
> \$20.00	6	0%
Average Wage:	\$9.50	

JFES Participants Earning Above the TFA Payment Standard / Federal Poverty Level in FY2011

Region	Above TFA	Above FPL
Eastern	307	77
North Central	935	266
Northwest	410	136
South Central	629	150
Southwest	399	93
Totals:	2,680	722

Note: Clients "Above TFA" includes clients "Above FPL" Both the FPL and TFA vary by family size
FPL of \$1525/month for a family of 3
TFA Standard of \$665/month (includes \$90 disregard) for a family of 3

Enrolled In Employment Activities

Activity	#	%
Unsubsidized Employment	1,830	22.9%
Subsidized Employment	130	1.6%
Job Search	5,102	63.9%
Voc. Ed. / Occ. Skills Training	787	9.9%
Basic Education	337	4.2%
Community Service	38	0.5%
Support Services	24	0.3%
Participants Served:	6,253	78.3%