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Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 209

Submitted by: Christine Limone, LCSW, NASW/CT Director of Political Advocacy

Good morning members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Christine Limone and I am the Director of Political Advocacy of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 3,200 social workers across Connecticut. I am here this morning in support of SB 209.

According to DOL 49% of current participants in the Jobs First Employment Service program do not possess a high school diploma. It is common sense policy to include the pursuance of a high school diploma or GED as an "allowable activity" in JFES participant's employability plan. You cannot separate education from employment – they are on the same continuum. Without the basic educational credential of a high school diploma, the likelihood of securing a job that provides a living wage is drastically diminished.

Prior to working at NASW, I was a program manager at an agency whose overarching mission was community reintegration. Two of the agency's biggest programs were our Supported Education program and the Employment services program. These two programs operated in conjunction with one another. If any of our voc rehab counselors had a client who did not have a high school diploma or GED, that client would first be set up with supported education services with the goal of earning their GED as the initial step of their voc rehab plan. If we were to bypass that essential step in the process, and had clients simply hit the pavement in search of work, we would be doing them a disservice and setting them up for rejection and discouragement. Our employment outcomes were among the best in the state for psychiatric rehab programs. This is part due to the integration of education services in the program.

In this economic environment it is simply unrealistic to expect that someone without the bare minimum educational credentials will secure a job. Participants in the Jobs first program should be afforded the same tools that my former clients had, so they can be set up powerfully for the best chance at securing employment. Possessing a GED or high school diploma is the first step on the path of self sufficiency. DOL understands this as "gaining a high school diploma credential" is among DOL's own recommendations to improve the outcomes of the Jobs First Employment Service Program.

Empowerment is a core value of the social work profession. This is why the National Association of Social Workers/CT chapter supports SB 209 to implement the Job's First PILOT program that includes the pursuance of a high school diploma as an allowable activity for participants' employability plans.

Thank you,

Christine Limone, LCSW
Director of Political Advocacy, NASW/CT