



The Connecticut Association for Human Services

Luis Caban, President

110 Bartholomew Avenue · Suite 4030

James P. Horan, Executive Director

Hartford, Connecticut 06106  
[www.cahs.org](http://www.cahs.org)

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**Testimony before the Labor Committee  
Re. SB 209, Jobs First Employment Services Pilot**

**March 1, 2012, 2012**

Submitted by Liz Dupont-Diehl, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services  
[ldupont-diehl@cahs.org](mailto:ldupont-diehl@cahs.org), (203) 667-5956

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Good afternoon, Senator Musto and Representative Tercyak, 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 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. 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.

I am here to testify in support of SB 209, Jobs First Employment Services Pilot. I cannot emphasize enough how important is it for jobseekers in this economy to have at least a high school diploma and other skills in order to get a job. We all know unemployment remains critically high throughout the state, and especially in our cities and for minorities. Educated workers, and "99ers" who have exhausted their unemployment, are competing for the low-wage entry level jobs that once provided a toehold into the workplace for those with lower educational levels and without work experience. It's vitally important that we allow recipients of TFA to pursue their education, and make it possible to do so.

I won't repeat testimony about the 49% of HFES participants who don't have a high school diploma, or the overwhelming evidence that poverty is damaging to children at all ages but has particularly damaging effects on very young children – harmful effects that can impact that child's academic success and earning power for a lifetime.

Instead I want to apply a simple Results Based Accountability standard to the results of this pilot – which should be expanded – and the current system. Consider for a moment how much it costs to keep a family on TFA – the benefit awarded to the family, the cost to administer the program, and the wages that mother will likely earn if she gets a job in accord with her education and training. If a small investment is made in training that mother, consider the money the state immediately saves – and the money the state gains, both immediately and over the long term, as she pays taxes, purchases goods in her community, is better able to care for her children and help them succeed in school and be more able to be financially viable themselves. Leaving the system as it is compounds the cost to the state for decades and families and children try to thrive in impossible circumstances.

In addition there's a simple and profound human reason. JFES participants are required to spend 30 hours a week on a "countable activity" and now nearly half participants engage in job search only. Think about what it's like to continue searching for a job in this economy when you lack a high school diploma. This pilot would help women and families succeed and lay the groundwork for greater systems improvement.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

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