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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee re. STRIVE and STRIDE (Department of Labor)

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Submitted by Liz Dupont-Diehl, Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human Services
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Good afternoon, Senator Harp and Representative Walker and members of the committee. My name is Liz Dupont-Diehl and I am the Policy Director for the Connecticut Association for Human Services. We seek to end poverty and empower all families to build a secure economic future. As the Connecticut KIDS COUNT partner CAHS has decades of experience advocating for issues such as the EITC and offering programs to increase financial capability and access to benefits.

I am writing today to express my strong support for two programs which I have had the privilege to personally take part in and witness firsthand – STRIVE and STRIDE. Both are proposed to be cut from the Department of Labor, although they are changing lives and successfully preventing years of future negative outcomes and costs by giving incarcerated and disadvantaged adults the real education and skills to succeed in the workforce – even in today's tough economy. These programs track their results and prove their value. Investing a small amount in these programs today yields savings immediately, in the near future for these workers, and for decades in the earnings and improved outcomes of their children.

The STRIVE program has 80% placement record with nearly 90% of clients keeping their jobs after 2 years. The majority of the clients are ex-offenders who have few options for training and placement. The program is operated in Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven, with sister sites throughout the US and internationally.

STRIVE recognizes that many people have never gained the foundational "soft skills" to succeed at the first jobs that lead to greater growth. STRIVE therefore delivers a personalized and practical

introduction to the world of work itself. Serving any Connecticut resident who chooses to participate, regardless of education level or income, STRIVE shows outstanding results compared to other employment and training programs, while operating at a fraction of the cost.

STRIDE is another outstanding program that is closely aligned with the community college system and the corrections system. STRIDE offers non-custodial parents workforce training and helps them connect with and support their children. It has been nationally recognized for innovation in addressing difficult issues. It begins working with parents while they are incarcerated and remains with them as they regain their footing in the community.

CAHS has testified about the need to realign incentives and fund programs that show they save the state money and improve outcomes for communities. These programs share the traits of being extremely cost-effective, measuring their results, and helping people effectively become successful workers and engaged parents. Imagine the payoff over time when a person moves from being an inmate to a taxpayers and contributing parent. The benefit to that person, his community and his children are all tremendous. These programs are successfully preventing these detrimental outcomes for all involved. Please look for a way to retain these critical services.

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