



Strengthening Connecticut's Families

**Testimony before the Appropriation Committee
February 22, 2013**

**RECOMMENDED BUDGET FOR DSS
SAFETY NET SERVICES NETWORK**

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the committee.

My name is Dan O'Connell. I am the President & CEO of the CT Council of Family Service Agencies and I wish to testify regarding the recommended budget for the Department of Social Services, particularly as it relates to the line item for Safety Net Services and the Employment Success Program which was included in the DSS budget and is now being recommended for transfer to the Department of Labor budget. The Council administers both of these programs on a statewide basis.

The Safety Net Services Network and the Employment Success Program were created by the Legislature in 1997 in response to Connecticut's welfare reform initiatives which restricted TANF benefits for families to twenty one months. DSS has contracted with the Council since that time for these services for TANF families who have timed off or been sanctioned off cash benefits. The program is administered by the Council through our 16 Non Profit Family Service Member agencies that are strategically located throughout the state and represents a true safety net for very vulnerable families - thus the name of the contract - *Safety Net Services Network*.

Before introducing Carol Huckaby, Director of Programs for the Council, I would like to make one point about the structure of this year's budget proposal. For the past several years the Safety Net Services Program has been a free standing line item in the DSS budget. This year it is proposed that this program be consolidated with nine other human service programs into the Community Services line item of DSS's budget making it virtually impossible to determine what the recommended budget is for our program. That is why today, two weeks after the Governor announced his proposed budget, we are unable to address the adequacy or appropriateness of this recommendation - we simply do not know what it is.

We have worked with merged accounts into a single line item in the past and it is confusing and lacks transparency. It also adds further risk to the Nonprofit service providers. I respectfully ask that you work to restore Safety Net Services to its previous position as a free standing line item in this budget.

Thank you.

Daniel J. O'Connell, Ed.D.
President and CEO