



Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Human Services Committee, February 14, 2013
Testimony submitted by Lucy Potter, Attorney
Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Senate Bill no. 27, ***AN ACT PROMOTING THE PURSUIT OF EDUCATION BY RECIPIENTS OF ASSISTANCE Favor; Raised Bill no. 6369, An Act Concerning Child Support and Enforcement, modify section 1 to keep lower standard of “reasonable cost” for low income obligors***

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid and have represented many clients who seek cash and medical help from DSS. I also serve on the Child Support Guideline Commission, but do not speak on behalf of the Commission. I am here to testify in support of S.B no. 27 expanding educational opportunities for TANF recipients, and against an increase in the cash medical support obligation which R.B no. 6369 would impose.

S.B.27 About half of the families that receive Temporary Family Assistance lack a high school degree. S.B. 27 would expand the opportunities for TFA recipients to complete a G.E.D., an associate’s degree or get vocational training. I would suggest that the bill allow completion of high school also, in addition to a G.E.D. where that is possible. As we know, only about a third as many families receive cash assistance compared to 1996, before welfare reform. But little of the economic savings has been reinvested in strengthening the employability of those who are in the Jobs First program. It has been shown in other states that there can be a real return in employment outcomes from such programs, especially where education and job training occur together.

R.B. 6369, section 1.

Section one of this bill changes the definition of “reasonable cost” for cash medical support. Previously, the amount was 7 ½% of net income, but 5% for lower income obligors. The child support guidelines define “low income obligor”; those in this category generally have income a little above the poverty level or below.

The bill changes the definition so that reasonable cost is now measured against gross income, but uses the measure of 5% for ALL obligors, eliminating the slight reprieve that had been given for the very lowest income obligors. The purpose behind the change is said to be simplification. But the change from 5% of net to 5% of gross income *increases* the burden for low income obligors by 1 to 2% of their total income.

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(And more when there are additional deductions for orders from other families.) The lower rate is even more compelling under the proposed guidelines which made very little adjustment to the schedule on the low end to account for increases in cost of living since the last revision.

Proposed revision:

R.B. 6369, Line 37 (iv) Health care coverage shall be deemed reasonable in cost if: ~~Such health care coverage does not exceed five percent of the gross income of the parent obligated to maintain such coverage~~ (I) the parent obligated to maintain such coverage would qualify as a low-income obligor under the child support guidelines established pursuant to section 46b-215a, based solely on such parent's income, and the cost does not exceed three and a half percent of such parent's gross income; or (II) the parent obligated to maintain such coverage would not qualify as a low-income obligor under such guidelines and the cost does not exceed five percent of such parent's gross income.