



Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies

Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee

February 14, 2014

Midterm Budget Recommendations for Department of Social Services

RE: Safety Net Services Network

Submitted by: Kim O’Rielly, President & CEO
Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies

On behalf of the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies, I am pleased to submit this testimony about the Safety Net Services Network funded by the Department of Social Services and administered by the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA).

We were gratified to learn that this year, for the first time in several years, there are no proposed cuts to the Safety Net Services Network as outlined in the Governor’s Midterm Budget recommendations. CCFSA would like to thank the members of the Appropriations Committee, Governor Malloy and the Department of Social Services for the ongoing support of this critical program –a program which provides a safety net for our Connecticut families most at risk – those with minor children who are unemployed and face numerous barriers and challenges to regaining employment.

The Safety Net Program was first established in 1997 in response to major welfare reform changes with the goal to reduce harm to children whose families have significant barriers to employment and are at risk of or have lost eligibility for Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) cash benefits. This Welfare to Work program provides home based clinical and case management services to help TFA families become self-sufficient. Families served in this program are primarily young female single parent mothers with an average age of 22-24 years, and 79-88% of families served are minorities –primarily African American and Hispanic. The Safety Net Program helps these families address their multiple barriers to employment that may include mental health issues, children’s developmental, educational and psychosocial issues, domestic violence, substance abuse, transportation and lack of education. By coming into the home and partnering with families, our workers help clients address their barriers, build life skills, and empower them to become self-sufficient.

The following is a brief story that illustrates how our program partners with families to foster success. Ms. Ross is a 25 year old female with a two year old son who, when she was referred to the Safety Services Program, was facing significant barriers including having an out of state,

unregistered car, no income, a child with medical issues, and a pending divorce. Ms. Ross had recently moved to CT and was initially able to secure a job. However, her son soon broke his leg in a playground accident and was unable to attend daycare until medically cleared. With no access to daycare and a lack of transportation, Ms. Ross had to leave her job and it was at this point when she was referred to the Safety Net Services Program by DSS. The Safety Net Services case manager made weekly home visits with Ms. Ross and working together, Ms. Ross was able to secure daycare within walking distance of her home, get permission from her out of state, estranged husband to register the car, apply for energy assistance, and continue her job search. Within 60 days all major barriers had been addressed and Ms. Ross had found a job as a waitress at a local restaurant. She is now self-sufficient, off TFA cash benefits and was recently promoted to manager.

With an increased focus in both the public and private sector on efficiencies and cost control, the Safety Net Services Network is designed to deliver statewide services in the most cost efficient manner. Administered by the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies, DSS receives the benefit of a statewide impact through the delivery of services by our network of 14 family service agencies. As such, one state contract, not 14, provides an efficient statewide service delivery system, where in-home services are available in every major city and town across the state. Other efficiencies includes the use of a web-based case management software which is accessible to case workers across the state and used by both DSS and DOL to make direct referrals to the program. It is well known that both nonprofits and state agencies have been slow to adopt technology and leverage the efficiencies that technology can bring to providing human services as compared to other business sectors. CCFSA has embraced technology and with our web-based system, we have streamlined what was in the past a time consuming and paperwork filled referral process. DSS and DOL workers are able to make direct referrals using our on-line program in real time. It is simple to do and cuts down on state worker time and cumbersome paperwork and, most importantly, ensures families are connected to services quickly.

With Connecticut's continued slow economic recovery, federal cuts to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and ongoing reliance on local food banks, energy assistance programs and other community supports, the Safety Net program is a critical resource for our most at-risk families. Without the Safety Net Program, many of the families we serve would be at risk of losing their TANF benefits, creating added risk to their children – including risk of abuse, neglect, homelessness and trauma. Since its inception the Safety Net Program has served over 19,500 families, with over 3,300 families receiving outreach and intensive case management services last year. We have reduced harm to children, prevented eviction of families, helped families with basic need payments to prevent shutoffs of utilities, provided food vouchers when SNAP benefits run out at the end of the month, and helped families engage in productive job search to move towards self-sufficiency. We have strong working relationships with our partners at DSS and DOL and look forward to continuing to deliver services through the Safety Net Services Network. On behalf of the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies, thank you for your consideration of the Safety Net Services Network and your continued support of Connecticut families.