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Testimony by Representative Laura Hoydick
Before the Judicial Committee
Senate Bill 458
March31, 2014

Senators Coleman and Kissel, Representatives Fox and Rebimbas, and members of the committee, thank you for holding a public hearing and allowing me to provide testimony in support of SB 458, **AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE TO STUDY METHODS FOR IMPROVING THE COLLECTION OF PAST DUE CHILD SUPPORT.**

The amount of uncollected child support in Connecticut is estimated to be $1.5 billion, a debt that represents great hardship and stress on Connecticut families and children. Last year the General Assembly passed Substitute House Bill No. 6678, Special Act No. 13-14, to study improving child support collection. As a result the task force has recommended some short term solutions and requests continuation of study to develop long-term recommendations in order to adequately and properly improve the child support collection program in Connecticut.

Connecticut ranks poorly in collecting child support for its families. In Fiscal Year 2012, Connecticut collected only 57.8% of all current support due to families with minor children (a federal performance measure); Connecticut ranked last among all New England states on this performance measure, and ranked 38th in the nation for collecting current child support. We are using a legacy computer system from 1993 which is inadequate in keeping up with the more than 200,000 child support cases. Connecticut has no web-based services for families such as on-line applications or on-line case and payment information. Without an electronic document management reporting system or dashboard staff must manage their caseloads by dealing with paper records.

Conversely the State of Pennsylvania is ranked first in the nation for child support collection. Their Child Support Enforcement Program has developed highly automated systems that give staff tools that (1) expedite case processing, (2) encourage a focus on difficult-to-collect cases, and (3) target cases based on the federal performance measures. These innovations include:

1. data-driven case management tools,
2. mobile and online tools
3. a paternity tracking system
4. automated interfaces
5. an automated case closure and order modification computer system.

OLR reported on Pennsylvania's success in establishment of paternity and collection of child support using technology and other innovations. I have included a link to the report for your reference and convenience. http://cga.ct.gov/2014/rpt/pdf/2014-R-0012.pdf

As a result of our study the task force has some immediate recommendations:

1. Increase special police officers from 6 to 8 for the Bureau of Child Support Enforcement (BCSE) for the Department of Social Services (DSS) to service capias mittimus warrants for child support collection. These officers will have access to the use of the Connecticut online enforcement communication teleprocessing system.

2. Fund $7.4 million to DSS to:

   a. Purchase Web Based Customer Service Portal [estimated cost $2.5 million]

   b. Purchase Graphic User Interface [estimated cost $4.2 million]

   c. Purchase Replacement Servers and associated hardware [estimated cost $500,000]

   d. Begin the Planning Process for Replacement of the Child Support Enforcement case management system [estimated cost = $200,000]

   e. Purchase of a subscription to a Lexis-Nexis product called ***Accurint***, a web-based investigative tool used by other state child support programs (including Massachusetts) to locate obligors and their assets. Estimated cost is $2,000/month or $12,000/year.

Total Cost of Short Term Technological Recommendations = $7.4 million. The General Fund would be reimbursed 66% of these costs from the federal government, with a net cost to Connecticut approximately $2.5 million.

The task force recommends funding $1 million to judicial branch to increase the staffing levels in the Support Enforcement Services Division. If 15-20 more Support Enforcement Officers were hired, these officers could proactively work with families, including parents involved in 14,000 cases where no child support is being paid and the program currently lacks information about the income or assets of the non-paying parent. These cases require labor-intensive research and these parents require personal contact in order to get back on track and begin paying their court-ordered support. These cases are not appropriate for court-based enforcement; they need "high-touch" strategies to produce collections. Similar intensive case management strategies have been successfully used in child support programs across the country, and have yielded good results.

The cost associated with an increase of 15-20 new support enforcement officers would be $750,000-$1 million. However, the General Fund would be reimbursed 66% of these costs from the federal government, with a net cost to Connecticut under $340,000.

In support of the staffing request, the task force report includes this information about the history of child support caseloads. Between 1999 and 2012, the staffing levels of the Support Enforcement Services Division decreased by 22% while the number of cases with orders, needing monitoring and enforcement, increased by nearly 25%. During that same time period in Pennsylvania, the highest performing state, increased its staffing by 43%, while its cases with orders decreased by 23%. Expressed another way, in Fiscal Year 2012 Connecticut's caseload to staff ratio was 425 cases to 1 full time equivalent employee (FTE). In contrast, Pennsylvania had a caseload to staff ratio of 163/1 FTE—nearly three times as many staff per case as Connecticut.

At Support Enforcement Services, the average caseload per Support Enforcement Officer is now over 2000 cases; officers in our large, urban locations are each responsible for 2400 cases. There is little time to engage in pro-active work with these parents as the priorities are responding to the most urgent child support needs of the most persistent customers, and meeting statutory duties to initiate, facilitate, and present contempt and modification motions in court.

And lastly I would encourage support of the bill as it has the Legislature creating a more comprehensive task force to conduct an in-depth study of the technological and other needs of our child support collection system which would include the purchasing and implementing a replacement operating system.

Thank you for continuing to recognize the need for updating and change in our child support collection program.