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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 409, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Good Afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie and Members of the Human Services Committee. I am Roger Senserrich, Policy Coordinator for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide, nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

I am here to express our support for SB 409, a bill that would require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to conduct a study on their performance serving clients.

For the past four years CAHS has worked with dozens of community based organizations across the state using CAHS's Access Benefits Online program (ABO), providing application screening services to more than 1,500 individuals every month across the state. Thanks to our data exchange agreement with DSS, we are able to track the number of clients who successfully enroll for benefits, and how long it takes for their application to be processed. Since July last year, our data indicates that the error rates and denials on DSS applications have almost doubled, along with processing times. Every day we hear from clients who are waiting for their benefits to arrive, have their insurance discontinued despite sending their redetermination in time, or call DSS only to hear that they can not find their application.

Although DSS has acknowledged these issues, there is little or no information on how the agency is performing its duties. DSS's annual report does not include information on processing times, staff allocation or error rates for its programs. Data on how many clients participate in each program, staff response times or churn rates are not public. We only know about the issues facing our clients from the clients themselves, and DSS case workers are often quick to dismiss any allegation of widespread delays out of hand. We do not have reliable, open, accessible information on how DSS is performing.

If we want to make sure that DSS is accountable to the public and its clients, we need this data. The agency should provide detailed reports on its caseload and how it is serving its clients, and should do so regularly. SB 409 compels DSS to conduct a study on its programs, to be delivered next year. CAHS would strongly suggest that the bill go beyond a one year

study, and establish a set of guidelines and reporting requirements for the agency so legislators, nonprofit agencies and the public are informed on how it is serving its clients.

DSS is currently an agency in transition, engaged in an ambitious modernization effort after years of neglect. To know if the reforms implemented are successful, we need to know more. As of now, everything suggests that the agency is not serving effectively those who need it the most.

We encourage you to support SB 409 and strengthen it. Thank you again for your consideration.