

Testimony of

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*Regarding the Human Services Provisions
of Governor Malloy's Budget Proposal*
Appropriations Committee

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Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Human Services provisions of Governor Malloy's budget proposal, which will impact hundreds of thousands of Connecticut residents.

My name is Dassana DeJesus from Waterbury and I urge the Committee to restore funding of Healthy Start, which is eliminated in the Governor's proposed Department of Social Services 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 budgets. I began working for StayWell in June, 2012 as a Medical Assistant in the Ryan White program. In March 2014, an opportunity became available to transfer to work in the Healthy Start program. I jumped at the chance.

As a young mother of two young boys, I understood the challenges that many patients face during pregnancy and in the early years of parenting. After having my son at the age of 19, I spent some time needing to receive cash assistance and enrolled in other support programs in order to support myself and my son. Fortunately, I was able to find my way to go back to school after high school. I now support my children independently and instead of working on my own care plan, I work with my co-workers to help over 460 clients each year through the Healthy Start program. I pay taxes and contribute to my community.

I understand that some believe that the new application assistance program with Access Health means that we no longer need programs like Healthy Start. First, the Healthy Start program was designed to improve birth outcomes for pregnant women. So the work we are doing goes far beyond insurance enrollment. We cannot continue to have successful birth outcomes unless our pregnant women have face to face support to stop smoking, improve their diet, are educated and assisted with getting dental care or are supported in being courageous enough to seek mental health services.

Even when we see young families who do not need this type of health education or case management services, our on-site services in addition to Access Health are critical. Mr. Lopez's story clearly illustrates this need.

Mr. Lopez came into the office upset and confused about his family's insurance coverage. After completing an application and enrolling his wife into a QHP on 1/15 Mr. Lopez received a letter from Access Health CT dated 1/16 stating that his wife was enrolled in a QHP and he and his 3

children were renewed into HUSKY. At one of the children's sick visits on 2/25 he was informed that the child was no longer insured. We checked the family's HUSKY eligibility which confirmed that the family was discontinued from HUSKY as of 1/31/15. We contacted the CAC hotline to find out what went wrong and whether a new application had to be processed. We were told "you guys caused his lapse in coverage because when you completed the application for his wife you should have also done his HUSKY renewal as well." We informed the Access Health representative that the application was completed over the phone through the call center and Mr. Lopez came into our office to get help to resolve the problem afterward. We then assisted Mr. Lopez with renewing his HUSKY. Mr. Lopez apologized for taking his frustrations out on the receptionist and the staff but he was upset because he tried to resolve the issue at home but the call center representative was not helpful and only confused him more.

This is just one example of the experiences we see every day. Some times people can enroll without problems, but on other occasions there are complications that require a more knowledgeable advocate to assist clients. Unfortunately, clients cannot get anyone on the phone at DSS to assist them and Access Health doesn't always provide the correct answers.

I encourage the Appropriations Committee to restore the \$1.4 million budget cut to Healthy Start. Not only do I believe in this program and have seen the positive impact on so many women and children, but I obviously am concerned that the next care plan I may have to write is my own. I have worked very hard to become independent. With a high unemployment rate in Waterbury, a lay off from these funding cuts would be devastating to my family.

Thank you for your consideration.