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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the

Department of Human Services Budget

by Nancy Boone

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Good evening. I am Nancy Boone, coordinator for the Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs, a statewide network of social service providers, advocates, faith based organizations, and individuals concerned about issues affecting low-income families and communities throughout Connecticut.

Poor families should not bear the burden of a difficult budget. Poor families simply do not have it to give. Cutting benefits for poor families a short sighted solution and will cost the state more money than it will save.

HUSKY A is a vital program and it works. Moving people- single people and pregnant women- with incomes of \$16,100 per year to Access Health might save the state a bit up front, but will ultimately increase the costs of emergency and long term care for people who no longer have access to the doctors and medications that will keep them healthy and working. Pregnant women moved to Access Health will not pay the premiums; instead, we know that many will forego prenatal care. This will mean more infants with medical issues requiring long term, and expensive, hospital stays, medications, and a lifetime of developmental and physical delays at a significant cost to the State.¹

Eliminating COLA increase for Temporary Family Assistance and State Supplement is another fiscally unsound proposal. People without any earned income rely on these programs. We know that very low income people put the money they have back into the economy immediately². Even a small increase, like COLA, produces big benefits for local business, which provides tax revenue to the State.

¹ Risk factors for late or no prenatal care following Medicaid expansions in California, M. Nothnagle, K. Marchi, S. Egerter, P. Braveman, *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, p. 251-9 December 2000, found at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11272345>

²How Does a Federal Minimum Wage Hike Affect Aggregate Household Spending?, D. Aaronson and E. French, *The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago*, August 2013, Number 313, found at <https://www.chicagofed.org/publications/chicago-fed-letter/2013/august-313>

Closing the Torrington Department of Social Services office and eliminating 13 positions in the Department is another proposal that will cost the State more than it saves. It is already quite difficult for people to speak to a DSS worker; almost two-thirds of families calling DSS hang up because the wait times to speak to a worker are over an hour.³ The substantial delays for people needing help, both on the phone and in-office, causes DSS clients to call multiple times and when that fails, to spend hours sitting in DSS regional offices looking for help. People are there because their benefits have been, or are at risk of being, discontinued. Most families submit all required documentation and DSS simply does not have the staff to input those documents into its system. This causes discontinuation letters to be mailed to clients, which causes them to call and go in to DSS offices, often taking unpaid time from work to sort it all out. DSS staff are essentially dealing with one problem for one family multiple times. This is inefficient and costly for the Department and the client. Clients are forced to take time from work to clear up a benefits issue that would not be an issue if there were enough DSS staff to process applications and redeterminations. DSS needs more people to process documents, answer phones, and handle in-office emergencies. Closing an office and eliminating positions will further burden an already sinking system.

Yes the State needs money, but the answer is not to take it from poor families. The solution is to increase revenue by eliminating tax breaks for very wealthy families and bring Connecticut's income tax for millionaires in line with neighboring states. Millionaires can afford it, the poor cannot.

Thank you for your work on these important issues.

³ ConneCT Public Dashboard, Connecticut Department of Social Services, February 2015, found at <http://www.ct.gov/dss/lib/dss/connect/connectdashboard.pdf>