

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the Dept. of Social Services Budget

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PLEASE RESTORE SAFETY NET SERVICES

Good Evening, My name is Susan Pribyson, a professional with over 35 years' experience in human services and it is an honor to come and testify on behalf of the Safety Net Services Network. I am the Director of Programs for the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies, known as CCFSA, an innovative statewide network of family service agencies working collaboratively to provide multiple programs, including the SAFETY NET Services Network of programs to support families facing poverty. We are, quite literally, **the safety net** for families who have exhausted their state benefits and are at risk of losing what little they have. **I urge you to restore the nearly \$500,000 in cuts to the Safety Net Services program.**

CCFSA's Safety Net Services Network in partnership with both DSS and DOL, help families who receive TANF to achieve self-reliance. We provide intensive, solution-focused case management and clinical services to reduce barriers to sustained employment. We approach families through a "whatever it takes" style to address their barriers to self-sufficiency.

What makes our services unique? The focus on children and the family unit, home based service delivery system, the inclusion of clinical services working collaboratively with case management and the commitment of our staff.

Our clients consist of the whole family. The case managers assess the whole family. Children cannot chose their parents - they are **powerless** over their parents ability to obtain and/or maintain employment - **powerless** over their parents ability to provide them with basic needs. It is critical to ensure the physical and mental well-being of the children in CT. The children did not ask to be born into poverty; we are the **SAFETY NET** for these children. Our programs ensure that they have clothing, a safe place to sleep, that they are receiving medical care and are enrolled in as well as actually attending appropriate educational settings. There's a

tremendous opportunity to make a dent in the prevalence of mental health problems, adult diseases and criminal behaviors by focusing on young children, the circumstances they grow up in, and the relationships that can help them withstand challenges.

All services are provided in the home or a community setting. It is important to see the home and the interactions of the family to determine the family needs, the barriers and strengths that can be leveraged to make a difference. These aspects cannot be evaluated accurately in an office setting.

All case managers are paired with a clinician who assess for mental health concerns that are barriers to self sufficiency or are impacting the care of children in the home. Clinicians can provide treatment in the home to help with stabilization - and help those with more significant issues obtain community service.

Our staff are highly committed to this vulnerable population and consistently go above and beyond in their work with families each day - currently serving approximately 3500 families a year - the proposed cuts will result in over 700 families and their children not receiving adequate support and will ultimately cost the State of CT more funding in other areas.