

Testimony of Stephen Monroe Tomczak, M.S.W., Ph.D.

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I am speaking to you today as a supporter of Mothers for Justice and as an academic researcher who has studied and taught about social welfare issues, with a particular focus on poverty, for 20 years. According to the recent ALICE report issued by United Way, more and more people are struggling in Connecticut and have difficulty making ends meet. The time is now to revisit the TANF policies enacted in the 1990s and make sensible policy changes, including some of the following:

- ❖ **“Stop the Clock:”** Time limits should be halted when TANF recipients are actively pursuing appropriate education and training. Connecticut has one of the toughest time limits in the country. Participants receive 21 months of cash benefits with the possibility of two six month extensions, bringing the total to 33 months. Many other states provide a full 60 months of benefits. The counter on months of assistance received should be halted when a JFES (Jobs First Employment Services) participant is actively pursuing a high school credential (GED or other) or associates degree or participating in an apprenticeship program.
- ❖ **Enhance Educational Opportunity:** We know education is critical to enabling people to take advantage of opportunities. To do this effectively for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our state, we need to make access to GED and other high school credentialing programs an entitlement for Jobs First participants who lack this credential.
- ❖ **Reduce income cliffs:** Jobs First participants should not face a complete loss of benefits at the end of 21 months or an extension period when they are earning the benefit amount. This serves as a disincentive to promoting employment.
- ❖ **Eliminate asset limit:** It is important that Jobs First participants be able to accumulate resources as they move into the workforce. This will simplify Connecticut’s administrative procedures and allow economically underprivileged people to gain a better foothold in the labor market.
- ❖ **Promote Better Care for Young Children:** Finally, we should exempt parents from the work requirement and time limits while child is under the age of one. Research shows that bonding between parents and children in the first years of life is essential to promoting positive outcomes for children later in life.

It is critical as you consider budgetary cuts that we not balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable in our state, and that we instead allocate resources to make these sensible and socially just reforms possible.