

March 11, 2015

Honorable Representative Toni Walker  
House Chair of Appropriations Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
State Capitol  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Representative Walker:

Keeping the State of Connecticut healthy is an important goal for both elected officials and concerned citizens. Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ) plays a major role in helping to reduce the chronic disease asthma, as well as helping save the state money since most hospitalizations are paid by Medicaid and Medicare. The Community Asthma Outreach and Education program of CCEJ has been part of the Children's Health Initiative and has been funded through the Tobacco Settlement Funds. Recently, I was informed that our Governor wants to fold the Tobacco Settlement money into the General Fund. A legislative act, such as this, would have a crippling impact on our most vulnerable citizens.

Asthma hospitalizations and emergency room rates in urban areas of the state are two to three higher than the state average. Residents from Connecticut's largest cities accounted for 41% (**\$46 million**) of the **\$112 million** cost of asthma acute care in 2009. Also, in 2009, **\$80.3 million** was spent on hospitalization charges and **\$2.6 million** on emergency department (ED) visit charges. (DPH fact sheet) These are alarming and costly figures and would have likely escalated without CCEJ interventions/programs.

CCEJ's Asthma Outreach and Education Program represent the best evidenced based practices serving individuals, families and communities in the State of Connecticut. Specifically, our program aims to educate low-income people, people on Medicaid, Blacks and Latinos, and the uninsured to identify uncontrolled asthma systems in their family and friends and encourage them to seek medical care before the systems become severe.

A very successful component of this program is the establishment of a Speaker's Bureau. This is a grassroots program of trained lay people who give presentations in churches, schools, public housing projects and shelters which assists people in recognizing the symptoms that trigger asthma and the need to seek out medical assistance early.

I reiterate the Asthma Outreach and Education Program saves the state money when people are referred early to health professionals and avoid hospitalizations or emergency room visits. **If through our outreach and education work, we are able to reduce emergency visits by only one-half of 1%, we will have saved the state more than the**

**cost of the program.** That is why it is so important to keep this education and outreach/prevention program and not allow CCEJ to lose its largest grant.

Representative Walker, I am a student at UCONN School of Social Work and my field placement is with Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice. I am honored to be a part of an organization helping to keep the state healthy, concomitantly improving the quality of life for our most vulnerable residents.

With the best interest of constituents you represent, please vote in support of maintaining the Tobacco Settlement Money in separate budget allocations and not being placed in General Funds. Thank you so much Representative Walker for attention to this very serious budget matter.

Sincerely,

Reverend Florestine Taylor

cc: Professor Walter Belsito, Adjunct Professor  
UCONN School of Social Work  
Sharon Lewis, Executive Director  
Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice