



## State of Connecticut

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### Testimony in Support of House Bill 5813 Human Services Committee February 5, 2015

Chairs Abercrombie and Moore, Ranking Members Wood and Markley, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **House Bill 5813: An Act to Increase Penalties for Illegal Use of Electronic Benefit Transfer Cards**.

We thank the committee for starting a conversation about an alarming issue that has become a problem nationwide. We continue to hear and read about instances of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards being trafficked in exchange for cash. A 2013 USDA report estimated that between 2009 and 2011, trafficking activity diverted nearly \$858 million annually from SNAP benefits. It has also been reported that nearly 10.1 % of all authorized SNAP stores engaged in trafficking. With the growing case load of SNAP beneficiaries, we are concerned that trafficking activities may be at even higher levels than before.

This bill is an attempt to discourage vendors from knowingly attempting to profit from social service programs, ultimately hurting clients who rely on SNAP benefits. We strongly encourage the committee to pursue policies that maintain the integrity of the program. We believe that increased penalties and sanctions against unscrupulous vendors are an appropriate action. If the schedule of penalties in this proposal is not the best way to get at this problem, we are open to other ideas and suggestions from committee members and agencies. But again, it's important that we begin to have this conversation.

We thank you for your consideration of this issue and we ask that as the session moves forward, the committee keep in consideration measures to safeguard the integrity of the social service programs and allow ways for the state to pursue to the fullest extent those who perpetrate fraud and abuse.

Thank you.