

*TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE*

*Camilla Jones*

*Town of Bloomfield Social & Youth Services*

*Connecticut Local Administrators of Social Services, Inc.*

*February 10, 2015*

***In Support of Proposed H.B. 6675: A DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES LIAISON TO MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS***

Good afternoon, Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Camilla Jones and I am the Director of Social & Youth Services for the Town of Bloomfield, where we provide programs, case management, crisis intervention, advocacy, information and referrals for the residents of Bloomfield. In addition, I proudly serve as the President of the Connecticut Local Administrators of Social Services, Inc. (C.L.A.S.S.), a statewide professional organization for municipal Social Services providers. I am here to today to support Proposed H.B. 6675 A Department of Social Services Liaison to Municipal Officials.

In our role as Municipal Social Service providers, we assist clients daily with enrolling and maintaining benefits provided by the Department of Social Services. Often times our clients receive notification that their benefits are discontinued, despite having submitted all of the requested documentation. This happens even when we as providers have mailed in the documents for the clients. Many have limitations that interfere with their ability to effectively advocate for themselves. Therefore, we frequently make calls to the DSS Call Center with them and we remain on hold well over an hour to reach a worker. If my staff have more than one resident requesting assistance with calling DSS on the same day, each worker can spend close to 3 hours or more, each day on hold with DSS. I'm sure you would agree that this is not the best use of our time. Many of my colleagues and fellow C.L.A.S.S. members across the state have minimally staffed offices and are unable to make these necessary calls to DSS on behalf of their clients due to the long wait times. This forces clients to call on their own, often times relying on pre-paid or free cell phones with limited minutes. With these limited minutes they often run out of time before even being able to speak to a worker and are also left with no minutes for the remainder of the month, even if they have an emergency.

When benefits are unnecessarily discontinued it is very detrimental to our clients. They are often left without needed medical insurance and prescription coverage, or without SNAP benefits to feed their families and don't have the cash funds needed to meet their most basic of needs. Often they will seek financial assistance from their Town to assist with paying for prescriptions that they are unable to afford, food for their families and other needs. Although financial assistance is a service we provide, it is not intended to be utilized as a backup plan to DSS' inability to process applications on a timely basis. This puts an increased burden on Municipal Social Services who are already challenged to meet the needs on the local level. We believe that

having a Department of Social Services Liaison to Municipal Officials will help us to better assist our clients, and help our clients be better able to access needed services.

Municipal Social Service providers have a long history of working collaboratively with the Department of Social Services, dating back to when cities & towns managed general assistance programs for our residents. Since the changeover to using the scan center and the call center, we lost the contacts and relationships that we established and now struggle to assist our clients with solving these problems related to their benefits.

It is our hope that DSS values our work and recognizes local municipal social service providers as allies in working toward our mutual goal of meeting the basic needs of the CT residents who are most in need of our assistance.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome the opportunity to be a part of the process to resolve these issues.

Respectfully Submitted,

Camilla Jones