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To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to provide testimony regarding the bill: S.B. No. 280 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES. Please implement change. We need more DSS workers. We need a new DSS Phone system. We need new DSS policy to address the many concerns of the most vulnerable of our community. What we currently have is, in many ways, much better than what existed in prior years, but it is still not good enough.

I am a Service Coordinator and SHIP's counselor for a community of elderly and disabled individuals. Many of the people that I serve in my building have the Safelink or Assurance phone as their only phone. As you may know the way to qualify for this phone is to receive benefits through Medicaid or SNAP, so many people in these programs have these phones. Participants are limited to 250 minutes a month and having to wait for more than an hour on hold is a barrier to services, especially if they have SNAP and have to call for the interview as part of the process. I can assist them but I often am on hold for almost two hours. A worker will only speak with me for one case at a time and I understand why, it does make sense. I serve 145 clients and in a typical

week I will have a least 3 of the 5 days where I must call DSS 3-4 times each of those 3 days and wait for almost 2 hours each time, so that is 6 hours of wait time.

As a service coordinator, my role is to empower my clients to do for themselves as much as possible and provide them with the tools and information, supplying direct services in emergencies and only when necessary. In the present system I find myself having to do for them directly, having them sign the w-298 because having them wait with me is a difficulty for us both and the other people waiting to see me as well. This does not promote self-sufficiency or empowerment.

In addition I can provide several examples of people receiving discontinuance notices and the paperwork has been received by DSS, but a worker has not been able to process it. In these cases the person becomes distressed because they fear the paperwork has been lost and they may lose the benefit. This vulnerable population cannot afford to have this stress. I call, wait for about 64 minutes, most recent time frame, and a worker processes it while I am on the phone.

I have had clients receive the wrong application. They have Medicare and received access health application sent to them. I have had a client request SNAP in a redet on November 18, 2013. I attempted several times to have a worker address the issue. They said they would call the client back. The client gave up and then finally got an approval letter on December 12, 2014.

I have had a client apply for the MSP in January of 2014 and did not get the approval letter until August 27th of 2014.

I could site many more instances but these are the few I could refer to right away.

I did write the commissioner with a suggestion and I never heard a response. My suggestion was: would it be possible for DSS to implement a call back system much like the ones used by Social Security, Unemployment and 211? With those call systems they keep your place in line but they call you back as opposed to a client having to wait on hold. They give you the option to have a call back or to remain on hold and they say that the person will not lose their place in line if they choose to be called back.

Please help DSS improve. We need more workers, a new phone system and policies to address issues that affect individuals who are at such a great disadvantage.

Sincerely,

Amber Hutton.