

January 28, 2015

TO: Human Service Committee

CC: Legislators

From: Emma Maldonado

Re: "Have something to say about DSS?"

Today, I would like to speak to you and your department as an individual. I speak to you as a Connecticut resident, who came to this state as a homeless and a victim of domestic violence. Yes, there were resources available. I ended up in a family shelter in East Hartford, which was great but also restricted me in developing and progressing along the way. It was through this moment of hardships and limitations that I realized what the government system is really made of.

Ideally, the system is set up in a way that makes people work for their government assistance and I respect that. I think it's a great idea; but I'm also aware through first-hand experience that it's not the most functional one. I am aware that not everyone is loyal and due to misuse of the system it complicates things for individuals and families that really do need the assistance.

I would like to highlight that my BIGGEST troubles were NOT when I had nothing but when I was supposed to be getting help instead. We all know that government assistance is not meant to fully support an individual or family but help. Once my financial assistance was approved through the state, my income was still limited and I had to start paying a decent portion of that income for shelter. On top of the shelter, I had everyday expenses for myself and my daughter. I was on a time schedule for both, the shelter and the government system. I had to start making contributions for the debts I had incurred as a runaway with my child. I had student loans which were deferred past its limits and ongoing issues with debt and finances. I had to go to job search and interviews through a job search program. Even as a college graduate it seems like opportunities weren't the best fitted. Everyone I ran into had faith that I would make it BUT faith did not bring the resources of opportunities that I needed. Once I got a job I was no longer eligible for assistance. Without keeping into consideration that I needed to clear my debts and create some savings in order to have a more stable and stabilized future, I WAS NO LONGER ELIGIBLE FOR HELP. Now, I'm considered middle class; I make too much money to get government assistance but not enough to stop living in debt.

There are many people that are often found in the middle class sector who can survive but these same individuals need more than just the desire. A coworker of mine often tells me and reminds me that she had the same struggles until she married. That kept me thinking that as a single mom, odds are not in my favor for progress. I fight harder but often find myself sacrificing family time with my child. I often feel that she is growing alone. I think that that's a huge sacrifice and the main reason why many kids loose themselves now-a-days so it sucks.

To keep it brief and not derive from the subject; I would like to suggest that when considering income for a family in public assistance they consider everything. The entire picture; yes, it takes more time to verify but it assures you that the right people are getting the temporary assistance they need and not permanent assistance from the government. I suggest more help for middle class who only need temporary assistance and less luxury for lower income family who continue to only live by the system. I suggest that assistance for low income families become limited, they will always have resources but there's a line to be drawn from resources to luxuries.

Working in property management, I know that people who already get financial cash assistance can get 3 months emergency housing. Meanwhile I had nothing and I was placed in a family shelter with my daughter. That same shelter where once I had my public assistance approved, I had to pay a shelter fee. Meanwhile, other families had their own temporary homes at a full government expense and so on.

I can go on expressing myself and getting into depth with my issues, what I feel, what I went through and so on. It's hard to put so many faults, in so little time, in paper and so on.

I just ask for a reevaluation of the system now and how can we make better use of it and its funds. I know a lot of people in need. I know a lot of people struggling. I know a lot of people living comfortable out of the system. I'm just saying that we need a more fair and personalized approach. We need better results. We are not truly ending poverty or homelessness. We're not even coming close. A change needs to be made and I don't think we're on the right path. If changes can be made, like in many other matters I am sure Connecticut can take a stand, take the lead and bring the change. I know they can!

Provide opportunities for those who are willing to be the change in society.

Thank you,
Emma M. "Proud Connecticut citizen since May 2013"