Testimony before the Human Services Committee
1/29/2015
SB 280 An Act Concerning the Department of Social Services
Lori A. McKinney

Good afternoon Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Human Services Committee:

I am a 52 year old woman, who has COPD and Degenerative Bone Disease. I have also been diagnosed with PTSD and Depression. I am also a recovering addict, clean for 22 years. I have been deemed disabled by DSS and was employed up until 2010. My unemployment ran out and I was so depressed I became homebound. My children moved out and I lost everything. I couldn't pay the rent so I applied for cash assistance. I finally got my assistance of $219. My Social Security Appeal is coming in February.

One day I was at the pharmacy getting my monthly meds, when the pharmacist told me I wasn't covered. I freaked out, got on a bus immediately to DSS. When I saw the worker she said "We got your paperwork, but it wasn't put into the computer. Now I sent my paperwork in a week before the due date. It should have been put in the computer, wouldn't you think?

I've heard from a number of people at Common Ground at InterCommunity, that when they sent their paperwork in, the same thing happened. Sometimes, they didn't get benefits taken care of for two or three months.

My solution has been to bring the paperwork in person whenever I have redetermination. Years ago, in the 80s and early 90s I was on assistance when my children were young. Years ago, in the late 80s early 90s DSS would have you come in once a year for redetermination. You saw a case worker and got yourself in and out. Now, we are lost in paperwork like our redetermination. Last year they lost a letter I had saying where I was staying after losing my apartment. I had to get on a bus, go get another letter signed and return before I was cut off my assistance. I would have had to reapply if I didn't get the letter there that day.

Here I was with oxygen tank and walker, trying to go back and forth. I was lucky I had the bus pass to travel—most don't.

I know it's hard on the department to get things done efficiently, because of budget cuts and such and 10 years ago having to shut down offices in the state. But, the clients are having to deal with the fallout. When it comes to the cash assistance and the SNAP programs I see why they need redetermination every 6 months. Because it stems on who is employed and who isn't. As far as Medical assistance goes in my case, my health isn't going to miraculously get better overnight. I have a disease and I have it for the rest of my life. I need medication I take every day which is 6 pills and 2 inhalers. "Diagnosis don't change", why every 6 months?

It seems that once you have your redetermination done for the SNAP you're filling the same papers out, with the same information for your medical. And the people with disabilities it should be once a year. Like I said, Diagnosis don't change. Sending papers into the Department is defeating the purpose; you still have to go see a worker to get things done.

In 2003, I moved to East Hartford from Meriden, from one shelter to another. With 3 children in tow I got a worker and there was a good process of my application in place. Let's get back to basics and put the Human back in Human Services. Thank you for listening to me.