



**Testimony of Magdalena Rodriguez
President/CEO, Community Renewal Team
Appropriations Public Hearing, April 21, 2015**

SB 1123: AN ACT CONCERNING EXPENDITURES OF STATE AGENCIES PROVIDING SOCIAL SERVICES

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Lena Rodriguez, and I am the President and CEO of the Community Renewal Team. I urge the Appropriations Committee membership to include language in SB 1123 that will ensure funding for the Human Services Infrastructure (HSI) administered to CT Community Action Agencies (CAAs) through the CT Department of Social Services.

The CT Community Action Network provides basic services such as food, shelter, heating assistance, and child care to the state's low and moderate income communities. CAAs provide a wide variety of services in all of our 169 cities and towns. Our cost-efficient and cost-effective services are provided using a multigenerational, customer-centric, integrated service delivery system called the Human Services Infrastructure (HSI).

As you may know, the purpose of HSI is to help Connecticut residents "avoid public welfare, get off welfare if they're on it, stay off welfare, get into the workforce, stay in the workforce, and get help with various critical problems the most efficient way possible" (CT DSS, 2015). Cutting HSI will devastate thousands of vulnerable individuals and families throughout the state who have varying degrees of human service needs.

HSI funding is critical if CT residents are going to experience the no wrong door approach to getting the help they need. Eliminating \$3.4 million of HSI funds to CT CAAs will actually mean a direct cut of almost \$5 million in services to low-income families since these funds are used as a match for federal funds. Last year for every dollar of HSI funds, nearly \$100 dollars was leveraged for programs to help Connecticut families and communities. Surely that's an investment worth keeping.

In 2014, CT CAAs served over 365,000 clients. Among these clients, CRT alone helped over 105,000 individuals from 40,000 families. Eliminating HSI funding will have damaging and long-term consequences for Connecticut families and the state's economy. Being able to serve every person who walks through CRT's doors is critical to alleviating the immediate and long-term effects of poverty.

CRT's service area covers 40 Connecticut towns, stretching from the Massachusetts border to the Long Island sound. Case management is the backbone of CRT's many programs, and is



supported heavily with funding from HSI. CRT has maximized HSI funding to develop and implement an intensive case management service model: Steps to Success (STS). STS is an intensive, holistic and strength-based case management model for families and individuals who require a concentration of services, interventions and programs to achieve stability and secure a better future. This successful service-delivery model is only made possible through HSI funding from the CT DSS.

HSI is the entry-way for anyone in need to get help. Without HSI, programmatic silos are created decreasing efficiencies and increasing expenditures. Most grants that our Agency receives require us to stick to specific outcomes and activities. HSI enables us to work beyond the rigid structure of program dollars and break down program silos to deliver comprehensive services. Using HSI dollars, we are able to coordinate direct services that don't provide for case management, a critical support service.

Over the last few years we have experienced many more working and middle-class families reaching out for help with securing basic needs for survival. Last year alone, HSI funding enabled CRT to serve 17,223 people, 15% of the total number of people served by CRT. In 2014, assessments conducted using CRT's HSI model, Steps To Success, opened doors to life-enriching, and, in some cases, life-saving services – the Fatherhood program, Financial Literacy and IDA savings opportunities, Generations (safe housing for grandparents raising their grandchildren), Housing Counseling, VITA, Foodshare, and East Hartford Shelter, an emergency shelter for women and children.

Without HSI funding, a critical mass of services and positions would be lost. For CRT alone, that means:

- Eliminating 24 positions,
- Ending suburban services in Manchester and East Hartford,
- Terminating neighborhood services in Middletown, and
- Closing one of Hartford's two Neighborhood Service Centers.
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Losing suburban and neighborhood services means losing case management, intake and pre-qualification for DSS services (SNAP, SAGA, and Care4Kids), food pantries, financial literacy, VITA, and assisted computer labs. There would be no walk-in services available at any of the remaining Neighborhood Service Centers, and the nearly 900 CRT food pantry recipients and 500 Foodshare monthly visitors would be left without access to basic sustenance.

HSI funding must be fully restored. The ripple effect of this cut will devastate thousands of Connecticut residents. Please contact me if you have any additional questions, or if the CRT staff can be of assistance. Thank you.



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