



Testimony before the Human Services Committee

March 3, 2016

**Against Raised Bill no. 277, An Act Requiring Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents to Meet Work Requirements to Received Benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.**

Good day, Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan, and I am the executive director of End Hunger CT!, a statewide anti-hunger organization, that works with the SNAP eligible population. I am here today to testify against Raised Bill no. 277, An Act Requiring Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents to Meet Work Requirements to Received Benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Who is an ABAWD? **A**ble **B**odied **A**dults **W**ithout **D**ependents are those between the ages of 18 and 49 years old, not disabled with no dependents under the age of 18 living with them. These are often the poorest people in our communities. ABAWDs can only get SNAP for 3 months during 3 years if they do not meet certain special requirements for work which include working, participating in a work program or qualified education program for 20 hours a week, or 80 hours a month. Looking for employments is not considered work.

The time limits have been a part of the law since 1996 but have been waived in almost all states in the country due to across the board high unemployment during the Great Recession. As the economy continues to improve, many states no longer qualify for time limit waivers, unless they have high unemployment or not enough jobs available. Connecticut is no longer exempt due to the better employment rates; however 82 towns in the state are currently exempt due to high unemployment rates in those towns.

This population struggles to find jobs when times are good. Half only have a high school diploma or GED and one-quarter have not finished high school, more than 40% are women, and close to one-third are over 40, half are white, a third African American and a tenth Hispanic. According to the USDA the national average in benefits for this group is \$150-\$170 per person per month. Losing the only benefit ABAWDs receive will cause a serious hardship; they have an average monthly income of 17% of the poverty line, and often do not qualify for other income supports.

Connecticut has received waivers from the USDA for 82 towns, due to high unemployment rates in those communities. Our state has done a very good job expanding our SNAP Employment and Training program and ABAWDs, among other SNAP recipients can receive job training. But there are not enough slots, the programs may be short in duration and once finished with the program a job search will not count towards the work requirement,

effectively leaving ABAWDs without the nourishment, or income supports, to actively pursue employment.

There are a total of 58,000 ABAWDs in Connecticut. Some have disabilities that will exempt them from this program. This legislation would effectively disallow the waivers that Connecticut received from the USDA which recognizes the difficulties many have finding work, or work that meets the requirements. It absolutely does not create any opportunity for this low employable group and keeps them in deep poverty.

We do know, from other states, which implemented the time limits without waivers decreased SNAP participation in those states significantly. Connecticut received approximately \$700,000,000 in SNAP benefits last year. According to Moody's each SNAP dollar creates economic activity of \$1.80 in addition to the benefit. SNAP dollars bring in over \$1,260,000,000 to our economy.

The food pantries and soup kitchens in this state are overwhelmed with people who are just over the income guidelines and not eligible for SNAP. They are overwhelmed at the end of the month when SNAP benefits run out. They will not be able to absorb more people, or people coming more often because their benefits have been cut off.

The beauty of SNAP is that it is elastic. When unemployment goes up so do SNAP caseloads, and when the economy goes down so does SNAP. That is what is supposed to happen as it is a support. The average length of time that a household is on SNAP is 8-10 months. It is there for people when they need it. And options are available for states to use, not to legislate away. I sincerely hope that this committee does not vote favorably on this bill, and votes to protect some of the most vulnerable citizens in our state.

Thank you.