



## CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES

A PRIVATE NONPROFIT CORPORATION  
211 STATE STREET BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604  
TELEPHONE (203) 336-3851  
FAX (203) 333-4976  
E-MAIL BRIDGEPORT@CONNLEGALSERVICES.ORG

NADINE NEVINS  
MANAGING ATTORNEY  
OFFICE

LORRAINE CARCOVA  
MANAGING ATTORNEY  
FAMILY UNIT

MATTHEW DILLON  
PATRICIA LUGO  
MARK R. MOORE  
MAUREEN O'CONNOR  
RICHARD L. TENENBAUM  
MARIA A. VARONE  
CATHERINE WILLIAMS  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

PATRICIA N. BLAIR  
MARK S. GUREVITZ  
ELLEN ROSENTHAL  
VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS

SHERYL-ANN BARRETT  
WANDA E. SERRANO  
LEGAL ASSISTANTS

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
62 WASHINGTON STREET  
MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457  
(860) 344-0447

ROSS H. GARBER  
BOARD CHAIR

STEVEN D. EPPLER-EPSTEIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### LAW OFFICES

211 STATE STREET  
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604

16 MAIN STREET  
NEW BRITAIN, CT 06051

153 WILLIAMS STREET  
NEW LONDON, CT 06320

20 SUMMER STREET  
STAMFORD, CT 06901

85 CENTRAL AVENUE  
WATERBURY, CT 06702

872 MAIN STREET  
WILLIMANTIC, CT 06226

### SATELLITE OFFICES

5 COLONY STREET  
MERIDEN, CT 06451

98 SOUTH MAIN STREET  
NORWALK, CT 06854

29 NAEK ROAD, SUITE 5A  
VERNON, CT 06066

## Testimony before the Human Services Committee on S.B. 277

March 3, 2016

My name is Matthew Dillon and I am an attorney at Connecticut Legal Services (CLS) in Bridgeport. My legal work focuses on the areas of landlord-tenant law and public benefits. My testimony today is on behalf of CLS' low-income clients who would be affected by S.B. No. 277 and I am here today to in opposition to this proposed legislation. S.B. No. 277 prevents the Commissioner of Social Services from seeking a waiver from the Able Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD) rule for our most depressed areas eliminating the safety net for 46,000 residents.

On January 1, 2016 the state of Connecticut saw the return of the ABAWD time limit rule. Since 2008, Connecticut voluntarily applied for, and was granted a waiver of this rule based on unemployment rates statewide. The rule limits single people without dependents to three months of food stamps benefits every three years, unless they meet work requirements or can show that they are unfit for work. Fortunately, the US Congress allows the states to request an additional waiver of the ABAWD rule for specific areas<sup>1</sup> that have an unemployment rate over 10 percent or do not have a sufficient number of jobs to provide employment for the individual; Connecticut, once again, has taken advantage of this optional waiver in order to help its struggling citizens. The City of Bridgeport, where I work, is one of those towns, where its residents struggle on a daily basis to make ends meet. S.B. No. 277 would force the state to disregard the waiver that Congress has written into the law exempting these towns due to unemployment.

The passage of S.B. No. 277 would have devastating consequences for the able bodied adults without dependents whose towns have been granted a waiver and whose continued food stamps benefits would be tied to finding a job that the CT Department of Social Services and USDA's Food and Nutrition Services agree might not exist. While the economy is improving slightly, it is still struggling in Bridgeport. It is hard for my clients there to find a job, and harder still for them to get one with the wages and hours needed to cover life's necessities, such as housing, clothing, and medicine. However, during hard times, my clients know that the food stamps program is a safety net to ensure they have food in their home. A 2015 report from the White House Council of Economic Advisors confirmed that food stamps work. According to the report 4.7 million people, including 2.1 million children in 2014 were lifted out poverty.

Passing this bill and forcing the state to disregard the high unemployment waiver would be a step backwards for Bridgeport and the 81 other towns relying on this waiver. It would not give Bridgeport's economy and the economy of other towns

<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.ct.gov/dss/lib/dss/snap/82\\_cities\\_and\\_towns.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dss/lib/dss/snap/82_cities_and_towns.pdf) for a listing of all 82 towns covered by this waiver.



such as Hartford, New Haven, and New London the opportunity to catch up with the rest of the state before imposing the Able Bodied Adults without Dependents time limits. It would leave the residents of these towns not only struggling to find a job, but also struggling to find something to eat.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.