



Donald A. Neel
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President & CEO

MARCH 3, 2016

Testimony before the Human Services Committee regarding:

**Opposition to SB 277
In support of SB 279
In support of HB 5439**

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Suzi Craig and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy at Mental Health Connecticut. We work to improve the mental health for all Connecticut residents through advocacy, education, and direct service.

The bills referenced in this testimony vary in subject matter but there two common threads that are of great importance that affect Connecticut residents and our system: access and efficiency.

Without access to care that is designed to support recovery and wellness, residents fall into survival mode or their health lapses, resulting in negative outcomes and higher costs for the state (ER visits, homelessness, etc.). By adding more layers of paperwork or outdated requirements, the system becomes inefficient, wasting more dollars on process that could be invested in benefits.

Here are our specific positions for each legislation:

S.B. No. 277 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WITHOUT DEPENDENTS TO MEET WORK REQUIREMENTS TO RECEIVE BENEFITS FROM THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

MHC opposes this bill. Currently, the state has a waiver to limit the number of people who would be taken off SNAP because they have not been able to find a job. This bill would eliminate the state's ability to do that and punish people who have been unable to find work by making them ineligible for food stamps.

S.B. No. 279 (RAISED) AN ACT WAIVING ASSET LIMITS FOR WORKING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TO RECEIVE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE.

We support SB 279. This bill provides incentives for working persons with disabilities to retain assets and still remain eligible for Medicaid. By removing the current asset limits of \$10,000 for a single person and \$15,000 for a couple, Connecticut can promote self-determination and self-sufficiency.



Donald A. Neel
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President & CEO

H.B. No. 5439 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF ASSET LIMITS IN CERTAIN PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

We support HB 5439 which would eliminate asset limits in the following programs: state supplement program, the temporary family assistance program (TFA) and the state-administered general assistance program (SAGA). Currently, the state supplement program has an asset limit of \$1,600 for an individual and \$2,400 for a married couple; TFA has an asset limit of \$3,000; SAGA has an asset limit of \$250.

Very few people have assets over the limit. Denials for being over assets account for significantly less than one percent of total denials. Asset limits cost the state money and wastes time that DSS workers could be using to process applications, rather than verifying assets. Most people who apply for cash assistance have very little of value. In fact, the average cash resources of a family that gets cash assistance is only \$315.

Asset limits keep people from being self-sufficient. Asset limits force low-income families to "spend down" personal reserves that can keep families from falling deeper into poverty and help them move to financial security and opportunity. The states that have already eliminated asset limits are reporting that doing so had a minimal impact on the caseload and saved money.

Thank you for your time and for your service.

Suzi Craig
Senior Director of Advocacy
Mental Health Connecticut, Inc.
61 South Main Street, Suite 100
West Hartford, CT 06107
Office: 860-529-1970, ext. 205; Mobile: 860-384-4480
scraig@mhconn.org