



Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Department of Social Services Budgets.

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Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan, and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization. End Hunger CT! has a SNAP outreach and policy program that includes a SNAP Call Center to assist with benefit applications and partners with organizations around the state in ending hunger in Connecticut. Our SNAP Outreach has a current emphasis on the elderly and low-income workers. I am here tonight to speak on the budgets for the Department of Social Services.

We have three concerns with the proposed budget. One, it is very difficult to figure out. As it stands now, it seems that every program within DSS will be cut, or start at zero, and with little to no input into their future funding. Some programs are moved to SSBG, some are taken out, but when one tries to see where programs get funding from now, it's impossible to tell. How can we know if the state's resources are going to the best places?

Secondly, with this budget there will be pain, we know this. This is precisely when the community-based organizations are needed the most. To help those who don't know where to go for help. For example, EHC!'s Call Center received over 8,528 calls to our SNAP line in 2015. Of those, 1,075 were for help with applications because the caller could not reach or get help from DSS. We prescreened 2,865 people to see if they were eligible for SNAP and of those 1,281 were first time SNAP users, while another 1,244 reapplied. We also work with people their yearly and six month redeterminations. Our call center is staffed with one full-time and one part-time staff. Some people are intimidated by DSS, or can't get through, or just want to talk to the same person, and that is what we do. What we do is make sure that people's applications are correct when we send them to the office so the process is speedy, and if not we have the information to clear up any questions immediately.

The budgeting process must take care to keep matches to federal funding intact. For example outreach for SNAP is reimbursed 50% for the program cost by the USDA. The state of Connecticut uses Human Services Infrastructure funds for SNAP application assistance from the CAP agencies to receive the funds that pay for outreach and application assistance. Loss of funding to HSI may mean fewer funds from the USDA to reach those who will need the service more than ever. Last year Connecticut brought in over \$690,000,000 in SNAP, which created over \$1,242,000,000 in economic activity to local communities in the state.

DSS contracts with many community-based organizations to do community work that they are unable to do. It is unclear, at best, which programs would remain funded and which would not. These organizations help DSS to do their mission “to increase the security and well-being of Connecticut individuals, families, and communities”. The CT Nutrition Assistance Program, or CT-NAP, pays for high nutritional value food such as proteins and produce for the state’s emergency food sites. These funds are provided by the state’s two food banks, Foodshare and Connecticut Food Bank to local area providers. These funds are crucial as they provide funding for food that may not be donated in large quantities. We appreciate that this money will be retained through TANF and the Social Service Block Grant. It is important to note that the food banks cannot charge more than 5 cents per pound for the food (and often much less) and pay the overage for transportation and administration out of their budget. It is a partnership between private and public charity. As you will hear tonight from the president of the Connecticut Food Bank, many of the people that they help are not eligible for government programs. We cannot add to this pool without supporting them with additional funds. Additionally, I would like to add that this is the majority of funds that the state provides to emergency food providers. Therefore, it is important to keep it in the budget especially when so many are using their services

Third, we do not support the proposed plan to consolidate all programs into one fund from which the Commissioner delineates where the funding goes. We are supporters of transparency and feel that the consolidation makes department appropriations opaque at best. With a \$3 billion dollar budget, there must be outside input from the organizations. DSS cannot do the work of getting people benefits in a fair, reasonable and accessible way without the assistance of the programs with which they contract. There can be no planning for the many organizations that receive funding through DSS with this process. It is our hope that we can have an open and fiscally responsible budgeting process, which funds programs adequately.

As you all know, from these budget hearings and the messages you receive from your constituents many programs assist people despite DSS. We cannot afford, in this time of need, to cut them out of the process, or to cut you, the legislature out of the process. We also cannot afford to shut these programs down, or decrease staff, or reduce the amounts of contracts as many of these organizations have been doing for years what is said year after year by policymakers, that we must do more with less. There can be no less for many of us. Your input on what works in Connecticut is too valuable to give away.

Thank you.