



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the DSS Budget – 2/11/16

Testimony from Alyssa Goduti

CT Council of Family Service Agencies

### **PLEASE DO NOT SHRED THE SAFETY NET**

Good evening honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Alyssa Goduti, the President and CEO of The Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA). CCFSA is an innovative statewide network of family service agencies who work collaboratively to provide multiple programs, including the SAFETY NET Program to help families facing poverty to address their barriers to employment and self-sufficiency. We are, quite literally, **the safety net** for families who have exhausted their state benefits and are at risk of losing what little they have. **I urge you fully fund the Safety Net Services program, funded through the Safety Net and Community Services lines in the DSS budget. This is a core program to support families facing the many challenges of poverty so that they can remove obstacles to employment and become self-reliant.**

### **Please DO NOT SHRED THE SAFETY NET.**

CCFSA's Safety Net Services Network is a model partnership between CCFSA, DSS and DOL, to help families who receive TANF to achieve self-reliance. We provide intensive, solution-focused case management services and care coordination that identify and reduce barriers to sustained employment. Services are home and community-based and are provided on a schedule and format that best needs the needs of clients. We approach families through a "whatever it takes" style, helping families address their barriers to self-sufficiency so that they can find hope for employment and ultimately a bright future for them and their children.

To date the SNSN has served over 21,000 families across CT and has reduced the possibility of harm or injury to over 40,000 children living in poverty. "Poverty affects children through direct material hardships such as food insecurities and hunger, inadequate clothing, lack of health care, living in overcrowded or subsidized housing or being homeless. But poverty also harms children by imposing high levels of stress on their parents, which impairs their capacity to give children the care they need to thrive."(CLASP, TANF and the First Year of Life-10/2/15) The foundation of SNSN is based on the premise that services, homebased clinical and direct case management will reduce the likelihood of harm occurring to children. Our program helps families become self-sufficient by building on families strengths and providing them with tools on how to use these strengths to succeed in parenting, employment, and education.

Last year we provided over 14,000 home visits to more than 4000 clients. We assessed and reduced identified barriers to employment and assisted them to community resources and state services that engaged them in productive job search activities that will result in self-sufficiency.

***PLEASE SUPPORT SAFETY NET SERVICES***

We understand that we are operating in very challenging fiscal times and the state will need to focus on funding core services. When families look to cut back their household budgets in tough times, they do not cut the items that keep them safe, strong and stable. The state cannot cut core human services that are essential to the health and well-being of our most vulnerable residents and each of your communities.

Of those families referred, our staff worked to break down barriers to assure that families are:

- Safe
- Physically and Mentally Healthy
- Free from Barriers to Self-Sufficiency
- Able to Find Employment, Education and Financial Stability

The Safety Net Services Program is funded through three separate accounts:

- DSS – Safety Net Services (for CCFSA)
- DSS – Community Services
- **DOL – within the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES line item)**

Although it has been proven to be highly effective in helping families reduce barriers to independence, find and maintain employment, secure safe and affordable housing and access basic needs to stabilize their families, the program has been cut year after year. Service demands have grown and there is no room to cut except to reduce services to families in need. We have seen a 35% increase in referrals to this program while funding has been reduced by 16% in the past 5 years. Service reductions would impact your constituents and would mean:

- Parents who are struggling will not receive the vital linkages they need to community services because this level of case management will not be an option.
- The single father who has not complied with his employment plan will have no Safety Net to catch him and will lose those vital supports and essential state benefits for his family forever.
- The mother of four who has used all of her food stamps can no longer receive basic needs supports to put food on the table.
- Families will lose their apartments because there will be nowhere to turn when they need help meeting their rent or negotiating with landlords. There will be no one to help address those barriers so that are able to focus on employment and a hopeful future.

**PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS:**

In addition to meeting our contractual goals of getting clients back into compliance so that they may continue to receive state benefits, the Safety Net Services Network provides significant additional economic value to the state. We've embarked on initiative with the Harvard Business School Community Partners (HBS CP) to quantify this added economic value to the state.

- Earlier analysis has shown that clients enter the program with an average of 3.28 barriers to self-sufficiency. Upon exit, clients report an average of only .79 barriers.
- Analysis done with the Harvard Business demonstrates last year shows that the program has a significant Return on Investment. It helps people become self-reliant and reducing dependence on state benefits and creates economic stimulus. People move from depending on state aid to being productive taxpayers. This was demonstrated through reduction in clients receiving TANF benefits, reduction in clients receiving SNAP benefits and in earnings through new employment.

The program is managed through an innovative matrix management system, in which our family service agency members who are in local communities provide the clinicians and case management staff. CCFSA provides program management, oversight and quality assurance. This unique model helps us maximize efficiencies, share best practices and provide a consistent delivery of the model.

The Safety Net Services Program provides vital and core services, through an efficient and innovative model that has proven not only to be effective but to provide significant returns on the investment for the state. Please help protect the SAFETY NET by supporting funding in the Safety Net and Community Services line items in the DSS budget.

**Safety Net Success Story  
(Client Perspective – Mother and son from Norwich):**

*“I was referred to the Safety Net program after cash assistance had ended and I was in dire straits. I had lost my job as a CNA because you can only work 120 days for a facility without a license. I was worried that my son and I would be evicted from our home.”*

*The Safety Net program came into my life right on-time. My Case Manager gave me hope that things would be alright as long as I continued to do some footwork to address barriers and work towards successful employment. Since then, I have re-established a good relationship with my landlord and made a payment arrangement for my back rent.*

*I found temporary employment but was laid off after several months. Again my PSM encouraged me. I've continued to look for employment and am enrolled to start a refresher course to get my license as a CNA. My PSM helped me with rent and with my electric bill so that I could concentrate on building skills that would*

*make me more employable over the long term. She included my son in a local program so that he would have gifts around the holidays and helped support us with food vouchers.*

*Although we came from very different backgrounds and at first, I did not think the Case Manager was someone I wanted in my life, today I am thankful; every day for her help. I am grateful to her and to the entire Safety Net program for ‘catching me’ when I was falling. I just needed a little help to be sure that my son and I would be okay. Thank you for the work that you do.’*

If you have questions or would like more information please contact Alyssa Goduti, President and CEO of the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies at (860) 571-0093 ext. 111 or by email at [agoduti@ctfsa.org](mailto:agoduti@ctfsa.org).