

Testimony for the Appropriations Committee public hearing on Human Services February 11, 2016

From: LifeBridge Community Services, 475 Clinton Avenue, Bridgeport CT 06605 www.lifebridgect.org

URGENT REQUEST TO FULLY FUND THE SAFETY NET SERVICES NETWORK PROGRAM

My name is Bill Hass, President & CEO of LifeBridge Community Services, one of the state's largest social service agencies that annually serves over 17,000 low-income people in Fairfield and New Haven Counties. We respectfully urge you to fully fund the Safety Net Services Program. Our organization is a provider of Safety Net services as part of a statewide network of local agencies coordinated by the Connecticut Council of Family Services Agencies (CCFSA).

Last year DSS and DOL identified and referred approximately 4,000 families throughout the state who were in need of safety net services such as assistance with finding and maintaining employment, securing safe and affordable housing, assuring adequate food and clothing for their families, and to achieve greater levels of self-sufficiency.

Tragically, state funding levels have been cut for the past 5 years even as the need for these basic services among our poorest and most vulnerable citizens has grown exponentially.

These cuts occurred even though the Safety Net Services Network is an innovative model that maximizes efficiencies, shares best practices, and provides a consistent delivery of services. Data from LifeBridge's Safety Net Program is just one of many examples that illustrate the urgent need for services and underscores the importance of fully funding the program.

- Last year (FY15), 50% more families than we planned were referred and received Safety Net services.
- In the year prior, LifeBridge experienced a 100% increase in clients referred to its Safety Net Services program.

Connecticut's Safety Net Service is a cost-effective program which ultimately reduces the burden of state subsidies in other programs.

Research conducted by Harvard Business School Community Partners (HBSCP) found that as program participants became more self-reliant and obtained jobs, their dependency on state aid was reduced.

- HBSCP's analysis of FY15 data from CCFSA's participating agencies, documented a reduction in the number of clients receiving TANF benefits, a reduction in the number of clients receiving SNAP benefits as well the positive impact of income earned through new employment.

The Safety Net Services Network provides vital and core services for current and past TANF recipients. Solution-focused and dedicated to helping these families become self-reliant and overcome barriers to sustained employment, the program has not only proven to be effective, but it also provides substantial return-on-investment for the State.

For all of these reasons, LifeBridge Community Services urges you to fully fund the Safety Net Services Program.