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Testimony regarding S.B. 105 “An Act Concerning the Payment of Funeral and Burial Expenses by the Department of Social Services”

Good morning Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and Members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Roger Senserrich, and I am the Policy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

Our testimony today is relating to S.B. 105, “*An Act Concerning the Payment of Funeral and Burial Expenses by the Department of Social Services*”, establishing the burial benefits regulations for indigent decedents. The proposed bill makes some necessary changes for state supplement or temporary family assistance recipients that die without enough funds to cover their funeral costs, expanding the provision that exempts funding from other sources or benefit programs so they do not reduce the state allowance.

This legislation is important, however, for reasons that go beyond this specific fixes. As members of this committee know, the budget adjustments proposed by the Governor reduce the state funeral benefits for indigent decedents from \$1,400, as written in this bill and currently in statute, to \$1,000. These benefits were already reduced in 2015, from \$2,000 to the current amount. We can not, and shall not, accept further cuts.

When someone dies in poverty, with no relatives close to him and neither the savings nor the resources to pay for his own funeral, we, as a society, have failed that person. We have a human being that reached the end of his or her life with nothing, alone, with no supports or help.

It could have been different – as a society, we could have helped them along the way. At some point, we could have helped this person maybe find a job, maybe save money, maybe find treatment, maybe pay for their rent, maybe support his or her family. For one reason or another, however, we did not help. We did not provide that support that could have turned their lives around, enabled them to save money, or find a better job. We did not help them help themselves. And because of that, they died, poor and alone, while we were looking the other way.

We have failed these individuals. Circumstances and life stories for each of them are different, and there is not a single reason on why they died poor, but it should never been this way. We failed them. The least we can do is to offer them a decent funeral, even if it is just as an apology. \$1,400 is already too little; do not let this benefit shrink any further.

Thanks for your time today.