



Testimony of Bernard J. Beaudreau, Chief Executive Officer, Connecticut Food Bank

Re: SB 270 – An Act Concerning Work and Community Service Requirements for Recipients of Certain Public Assistance Programs

Co-Chairs Moore, Abercrombie, and Markley, and members of the Human Services Committee, the Connecticut Food Bank respectfully submits this testimony in strong opposition to Senate Bill 270, which would restrict certain waivers of work and community service requirements for able bodied adults without dependents – referred to as “ABAWDs” – receiving Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. We strongly believe this legislation is ill-considered and would harm many Connecticut residents who would face increased hunger and food insecurity.

The Connecticut Food Bank, which serves as a supplement to government nutrition safety net programs like SNAP, provides 21 million meals annually to approximately 150,000 food insecure people throughout our six-county service area. This number of people served represents only half of the food insecure population in need. Any reduction in the government food safety net puts added pressure on our food bank and the hundreds of emergency food providers across the state who depend on us for much of their food supply. Cutting any SNAP benefits, when much more is needed, sets us back in the battle against hunger.

The people targeted by this unfortunate bill will be forced to seek help at a food pantry if they aren’t already, because the average monthly SNAP benefit in Connecticut in 2016 was \$132 per person. How many of us could meet our food needs on \$33 a week? If the Connecticut Food Bank is currently reaching only half of those in need, it is inconceivable that we could meet additional need among the people forced to turn elsewhere for help when SNAP is taken from them.

The Connecticut Food Bank, along with Foodshare, are just two of more than 200 food banks across the U.S. addressing hunger. Collectively, we distribute a fraction of what the federal SNAP provides. We recognize that the SNAP program is our nation’s first defense against hunger. Food banking is here to help but clearly could never replace the magnitude of our country’s 50-year tradition of guaranteeing the basic right to food.

To give a sense of scale, in Connecticut, our two food banks work hard to acquire and distribute many millions of pounds of food each year valued at about \$70 million. This is roughly a tenth of \$686 million in dollar value of federal SNAP benefits that households in Connecticut receive and spend in grocery stores.

While we are focused on dollars, we must also point out that there will be little to no impact on state spending related to this legislation. SNAP is a federal program. Eliminating this waiver doesn’t reduce state spending, it simply denies people access to food. But it does cost money. It results in fewer jobs, lower tax revenue from food retailers, and lower employee wage taxes, as well as increased burdens on other parts of the human services safety net.

Any action taken by our state to reduce the benefit of SNAP to individuals in need causes more hunger directly and indirectly. Not only is there a direct positive nutritional impact on people in need, there is also an economic multiplier. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities reports that Moody’s Analytics estimates that SNAP pumped about \$686 million into Connecticut’s economy in 2016, generating roughly \$1.70 for every dollar spent. Reducing SNAP spending costs Connecticut revenue and jobs.

This proposal to cut the ABAWDs from the SNAP program is also especially inhumane. It creates an unnecessary hardship for individuals struggling to get out of poverty, survive on low wages and part-time work and ultimately improve their lives and livelihoods.

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The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities recently issued a report entitled, “Making SNAP Work Requirements Harsher Will Not Improve Outcomes for Low-Income People.” To quote the report:

“SNAP is a crucial work support. Most working-age adults on SNAP who can work do so. Workers in the low-wage market can’t rely on always having a steady full-time job that pays a living wage and work requirements won’t create these jobs.”

The Connecticut job market has continued to present persistently low wage employment in the service sector in the post-recession period. Low wage earners filled 2,057 more jobs in 2016 than 2015, representing 11% of the workforce. Median earnings of low wage jobs in the service sector saw an increase of 1.7% over the past five years, compared to 5.2% for all workers. At the 2016 median earnings of \$31,425 per year, most of these workers cannot afford their basic needs, including food, in a high-cost state where monthly rents average more than \$1,100. And individuals earning that median wage in Connecticut already make too much money to qualify for SNAP benefits.

We strongly object to the intention of this bill to discipline workers off the essential benefit of a supplemental supply of food through the SNAP. It is built on false assumptions and beliefs and certainly not out of the experience of those who struggle to make ends meet. Presently 114 cities and towns – 67% of all communities in the state – would be eliminated from the ABAWD exemption, meaning that there would be many thousands of individuals hurt by this ineffective and harmful legislation.

We ask that the Legislature reject this proposed bill and focus on positive ways to help our neighbors in need throughout the state.