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Testimony on Committee Bill 6635: An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance
Human Services Committee
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On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 2,300 members statewide, we thank the Human Services Committee for raising 6635 and offer this testimony in strong support of Committee Bill 6635. NASW/CT has a long history of supporting positive TANF reforms aimed at providing improvements in the economic circumstances of TANF households.

The proposed reforms to the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program, Connecticut's TANF program, accomplish several important objectives, including extending the time limit for temporary family assistance to sixty months, eliminating the so-called "family cap" penalties for families with children born after enrollment in the program and ensuring benefits are adequate to meet the cost of living for beneficiaries. Importantly, H.B. 6635 also exempts benefits received during the COVID-19 public health emergency from the time limit.

All of these policy changes have substantial support in academic literature, and as someone who has conducted research on public assistance policies and programs for over a quarter of a century, and did dissertation research specifically on family cap policies, I feel compelled as a social worker to testify in support of these needed policy changes.

Restrictive time-limit policies have been shown not only to exacerbate poverty and economic insecurity for low income families with children, they have not been associated with consistent achievement of their supposed objectives in promoting employment among families with children.¹ And, there is some reason to believe that shorter time limits may produce even more deleterious effects, as they do not allow enough time for recipients to acquire necessary skills to obtain employment that provides an adequate income.²

Family Cap policies also have been shown to be harmful to children and families receiving TANF, and ineffective in achieving their supposed objective of reducing

¹ Pepin, G. (2020). *Effects of welfare time limits*. W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

² Farrell M., Rich, S., Turner, L., Seith, D. and Bloom, D. (2008). *Welfare Time Limits: An Update on State Policies, Implementation, and Effects on Families*. Lewin Group and MDRC.

reproduction by such families. Thus, even if you accept the highly questionable premise that people have children to get the measly additional increments provided under the TANF program, the empirical research does not show that this policy is effective in curbing this. And – something which should cause some concern among those who typically favor these policies – they have been associated with an increase in abortions.³

As we all know the cost of living in Connecticut is high, and the burden of this falls disproportionately on low income families with children. This problem has only been intensified by the lack of consistent cost of living increases in TFA benefits in Connecticut. Over the last 12 years, the COLA has been funded only twice for TFA. H.B. 6635 will address this by “provid[ing] a cost-of-living adjustment in temporary family assistance benefits equal to the most recent percentage increase in the consumer price index. . . .”⁴

Finally, it is also well documented that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted poor and low income families, particularly the most vulnerable who are receiving public assistance benefits such as Temporary Family Assistance. Recent research documenting this impact shows increases in food insecurity and debt, and a high prevalence of job loss among aid recipients.⁵ H.B. 6635, by including several provisions to ensure flexibility in administering provisions of TFA, allows officials to alleviate some of the negative program impacts to which recipients would ordinarily be subject.

In closing, then, we urge you to support H.B. 6635. As social workers, our Code of Ethics obligates us to “advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs,”⁶ and it is the strong belief of our chapter that H.B. 6635 will help move our state’s public assistance policy in this direction. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

³ Camasso, M. J. (2007). *Family caps, abortion and women of color: Research connection and political rejection*. Oxford University Press.

⁴ H.B. 6635, 2020 Reg. Sess. (CT 2020). <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/TOB/H/PDF/2021HB-06635-R00-HB.PDF>

⁵ Enriquez, D. and Goldstein, A. (2020). COVID-19’s Socioeconomic Impact on Low-Income Benefit Recipients: Early Evidence from Tracking Surveys. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*. Volume 6, pp. 1-17.

⁶ National Association of Social Workers (1996, rev. 2017). *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. NASW Press. p. 29.