



Testimony for the Appropriations Committee

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February 19, 2020

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon/evening.

My name is Bill Hass and I am the President & CEO of the CT Council of Family Service Agencies. We are a 15 member statewide provider network that for 30 years has provided an array of human services including behavioral health and case management services to various client populations, including those who receive TANF benefits. Many of the 180,000 clients served by our network annually are among the most disadvantaged children and families in CT, many living at or below the poverty level. CCFSA is currently the provider of statewide case management services for the CT TANF population. AS a network CCFSA employs over 5000 people.

I would like to start by asking the Committee a question: How many of you are ok with residents of CT having to live in poverty?

I wonder how many members of the audience are ok with people having to live in poverty?

No one here feels that way and I would guess that if you asked that question of anyone in the building, the answer would be the same:

No one is ok with CT residents having to live in poverty.

The Ct TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) Reform legislation enacted in 1998 has led to two decades of continuous policies, structures and funding largely resulting in families remaining in poverty with limited opportunity to move toward economic stability. As a State, CT has inadvertently, through practice and policies, created a system for keeping families living in poverty rather than offering them a clear path to economic self-sufficiency.

To survive, these families must function within a system which does not empower or support economic mobility, but rather presents them with obstacles that make it next to impossible to move forward toward a better life.

Like Mary a single mom with three children suffering from diabetes and hypertension, living in substandard housing and unable to work who receives TANF cash benefits and struggles to support herself and her family. Or Charlene, married with two children, a victim of domestic violence who cannot keep herself and her children safe from an abusive husband and father. She works, but cannot exceed a certain income level or she may lose valuable support for food and daycare for her children. There are no incentives for her to rise up a career ladder. She is stuck living in poverty struggling day after day within in a broken system. In addition, there is a lack of basic resources for families: such as an average cash benefit of \$479/month which places a family of 3 at less than 30 % of the federal poverty level, leaving children in deep poverty. Low-income limits for eligibility mean that access to benefits is very limited with only 21, 000 adults and children receiving a benefit, despite the fact that one in ten individuals (356,529) in CT live in poverty.

CCFSA TANF Case Management program works with people like Mary and Charlene on a daily basis to help them to eliminate barriers that prevent them from working. Some of these obstacles cannot be overcome because the TANF system is structured not to empower but to entangle them in a system of outdated rules and regulations and limited cash benefits.

In CT, the TANF program provides cash assistance for a limited time to single and two parent families with children who have no or extremely low income as well as a range of employment and case management services. These are helpful, but the restrictions on the kinds and types of services, the duration of training, and limited financial resources made available make it extremely difficult for individuals to complete the necessary training to qualify for jobs that could provide a living wage.

The CT TFA services are structured in a way that most needy families do not receive the level of assistance and support necessary for them to move forward toward economic stability free of state assistance. **There is an opportunity to change this scenario and to stand behind our belief that no one should live in poverty.**

Investing in families now, by enacting changes in the CT TANF program, will reduce expenses to the State in the long run by supporting families living in poverty. By modifying program restrictions, parents will have better chances to develop work skills and earn credentials that will lead to work and increase their economic mobility. An investment in additional employment, education, training and support services leading to an individual's ability to earn a living wage would eliminate this expenditure, replacing this with additional state taxes and increased goods and services in local communities for years to come. Not only would these modifications to the TANF program benefit families who live in poverty, but would help business and industry with a partial solution for the lack of qualified workers to fill vacant positions across the state.

The 2Gen Workforce Work Group and the full 2Gen Advisory Board will soon release a document with recommendations proposing systems reform, outlining short and long-term solutions to improve opportunities for families and children. CCFSA whole heartedly supports those recommendations.

I would challenge our legislators with the questions: **WHY would you not want to empower our disenfranchised citizens? Why keep people entrenched in poverty?**

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no plausible reason, so please support a statewide effort to fix this broken system and properly support and advocate for economic mobility for those living at or below the poverty level.

May I also state that CCFSA is a member of the CT Alliance for Nonprofits. We are asking you to consider an allocation of \$461 million dollars, allocated over the next five years for community nonprofits.

Since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services over the last thirteen years. Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving people in need and employing tens of thousands. Please support this request so that we can continue to do so in the years ahead.

Thank you