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Testimony before the Education Committee

SB 112 An Act Providing Child Care for Assistance Recipients Enrolled in Approved Higher Education Programs

Good Afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleishmann, and Members of the Education Committee.

My name is Elizabeth Fraser; I am a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work. I am here to comment on SB 112: An Act Providing Child Care for Assistance Recipients Enrolled in Approved Higher Education Programs.

SB 112 adds language to existing TANF statute to include two or four-year college attendance as an eligible TANF activity. CAHS is in favor of this change. Inserting this language within section 17b-688i links a TANF recipient's participation in a college program to Care4Kids more intentionally. It should be noted, however, that SB 112 only gives The Department of Labor and the Department of Social Services *permission* to implement such strategies, but it does not prescribe it.

Economic opportunity is often dependent on educational attainment. High school completion and some level of post-secondary attainment are necessary to attain employment capable of supporting a family. The attached info-graphic, *Raising a Family in Connecticut*, clearly shows how additional training or education past high school are necessary for a family to become financially stable. (Attachment A)

Many of our lowest income parents, however, lack the education and/or training to gain viable employment. Our current strategy prescribes that TFA recipient receives short term training or education and get into the labor force as quickly as possible. The jobs available for those with limited education or training are often lower wage positions that will not provide for family economic stability. Without education and family supports, there is little opportunity for these families to rise out of poverty.

Longer term education or training is often necessary for a parent to reach a level of educational attainment that would allow for greater employability. While this might include college coursework, we believe parents should also be able to participate in longer term programs to attain high school equivalency, transitional programs toward college or apprenticeships. To participate and have success in programs with longer duration, including college, stable childcare is a necessity. At present, Temporary Family Assistance only provides childcare for short -term education or training programs.

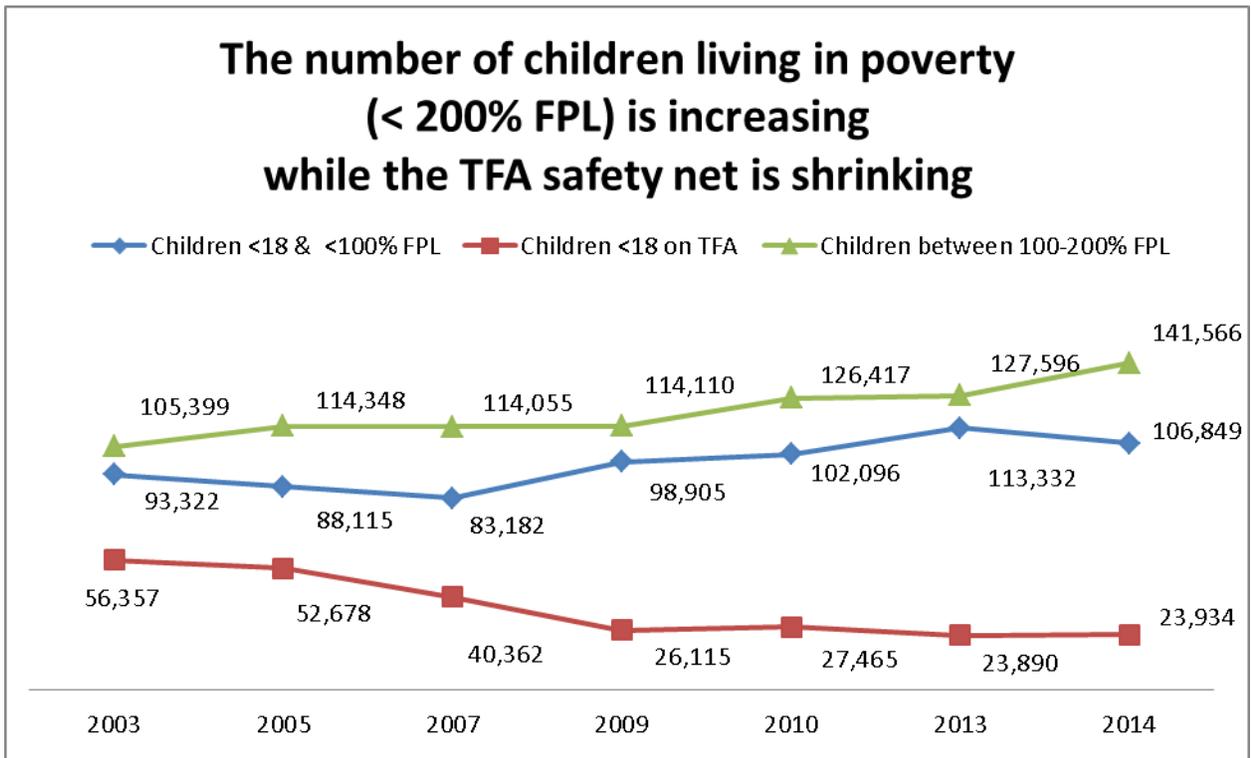
If allowed to be implemented, SB 112 would provide parents the opportunity to attend longer -term education and training programs, attached to the secure child care necessary to allow for successful participation. With increased educational attainment, TANF parents would have access to higher wage employment opportunities.

This is just one side of the family picture. We believe that addressing the need to expand educational opportunity for TANF parents is both a workforce issue and a *children's* issue. It speaks to what we all know intuitively; when parents do better, children do better. Children live and grow within their family; there is increasing evidence that the circumstances of living poverty can have long lasting negative effects on children. Addressing the needs of parents has significant implications for the future of their children.

Recent studies and relevant data inform us that when parents are better educated, children have stronger educational outcomes. (Attachment B) A recent research report, *Mother's Education and Children's Outcomes*, includes data that highlights the intergenerational effect of poverty. In Connecticut, 52% of children whose mothers do not have a high school diploma are living below the federal poverty level; 58% are living in a household with a parent that is not securely employed. There is evidence that the children in these families are far less likely to succeed as they progress through school. In Connecticut, only 22% of these children demonstrate "Proficiency" in reading in 8th grade and only 14% demonstrate "proficiency" in math. (Hernandez, 2014) Corroborating research informs that a mother's level of education is one of the best predictors of success for their children.

Yet, when we examine how we are spending TANF dollars and the impact on child poverty, the results are startling. Despite the fact that since 2003 the number of children living under 200% of poverty is growing, the number of children receiving TFA benefits has decreased substantially (Figure 1). We can do better. At present Connecticut is using very little of our TANF dollars on core services, which includes those that are directly tied to workforce, basic assistance spending and childcare (Figure 2). A much larger amount, 66% of the total funding, is designated for a category named "Other".

Figure 1



TFA data is courtesy Carl Theisfield , Connecticut Department of Social Services ,Poverty data is courtesy of IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Figure 2

Average spending	US	Connecticut
Basic Assistance Spending	28%	17%
Work Related Activities and Supports	8%	4%
Child Care	16%	7%
Total Core Services	51%	28%

2014 LaDonna Pavetti, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Continuing in the status quo, with little regard for long -term *family* outcomes, does little to provide TANF families a path to economic security, help our fragile economy to heal or give children a chance. The more we can give low income families access to employment opportunities that offer a path to family economic security, the stronger our state will become.

SB 112 is a necessary first step towards systems change. In these times of difficult budget decisions, we must re-think how we use TANF dollars to more intentionally provide long-term results for the entire family. By increasing and connecting higher level educational opportunities, workforce advancement programs, quality childcare and wrap around supports, outcomes for parents and children will be stronger. If these and other strategies are implemented we have greater potential to grow a strong workforce, foster resilient children and turn the curve on childhood poverty.