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3-1-16

### **Testimony regarding H.B. 5439, concerning asset limits in certain public assistance programs**

Roger Senserrich- Policy Director, Connecticut Association for Human 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 at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide non profit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

I am here to express our support to HB.5439, a bill that would introduce some significant and necessary changes to the Temporary Family Assistance program (TFA) in Connecticut and other cash assistance programs.

As you know, TFA is the state program that provides cash assistance to very low-income families, Connecticut's implementation of the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TFA benefits are usually time-limited to 21 months, with some limited exemptions. There are approximately 34,000 households currently receiving TFA in Connecticut; to remain in the program, participants must comply with work requirements or be actively looking for a job.

States have considerable leeway when implementing TANF. Federal rules allow them to determine a wide range of eligibility and enrollment rules, from lifetime time limit policies to asset limits and recovery provisions. Connecticut's version of the program is in many ways very restrictive compared to other states<sup>1</sup>. Our state, for instance, has the shortest lifetime time limit of any state; the vast majority of states allow the federal maximum of 60 months, while Connecticut limits recipients to 21. Connecticut's income guidelines to apply for the program (families below the federal poverty level) are below those of other states like Massachusetts, Mississippi or Florida (185 per cent of federal poverty). Contrary to other states like Colorado, Louisiana or Maryland, Connecticut imposes a \$3,000 asset limit on recipients, preventing them to save money to become self-sufficient.

TFA, as currently structured, is not adequately serving the needs of children and families in Connecticut. Although the number and percentage of children living in poverty in the state has increased since 2003, the number of children receiving TANF assistance has dropped roughly by half.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.urban.org/publications/412973.html>

