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Testimony to the Appropriations Committee –Human Services

2/10/16 – Roger Senserrich, Connecticut Association for Human Services

Good morning Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Appropriations Committee Human Services Subcommittee. My name is Roger Senserrich, and I am the Policy Director at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success for children and families through both policy and program work.

I am here today to discuss some important issues relating to the Governor’s midterm budget adjustment proposals, and some changes that could jeopardize crucial services for low-income families in the state.

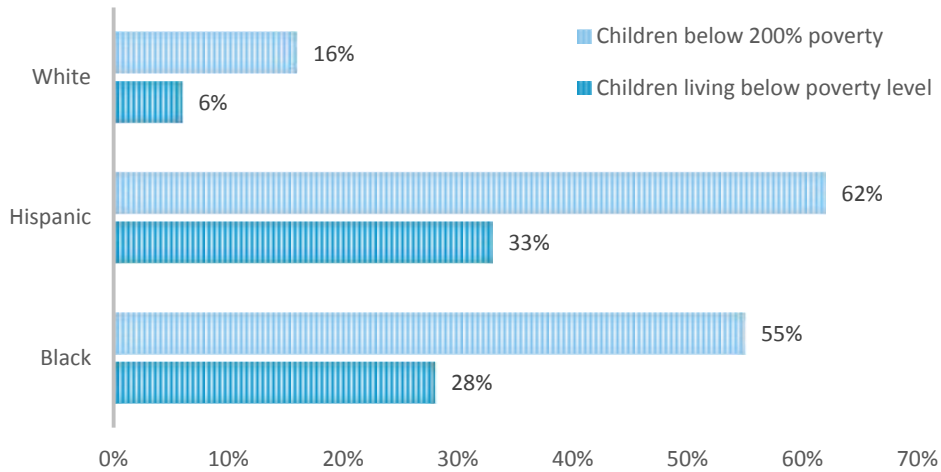
The starting point for the Governor’s proposal is a 5.75% spending reduction to many social services across the board. The cut is by itself worrisome, but the revision’s lack of detail adds to the problem. Instead of the traditional budget breakdown of proposed reductions with specific explanations of what line items are facing cuts, this proposal just offers an agency-wide spending level, and gives the authority to each agency head to decide where to cut. The result is a budget that imposes harsh spending cuts but is lacking in transparency, with no information on what programs will be eliminated.

This is not acceptable. Transparency is an essential for accountability. The Governor’s budget proposal shifts the responsibility and decision making for crucial spending decisions from an open, public process at the General Assembly towards one with no public participation, no open hearings and limited accountability. We understand that the budget situation is challenging, and that Connecticut has to take some tough decisions. The only way to make those decisions and introduce real, needed changes to the state budget is through an open, accountable and transparent budget process, not by delegating authority to the executive branch.

Creating transparency is not sufficient: we also need to stop cuts to programs serving vulnerable children and families. Despite years of economic recovery, many in Connecticut still need access to human services. 114,000 children in the state live in poverty. The child poverty rate jumped from 10% before the recession to 15% in 2014. In addition, 32% of children live in low income families (under 200% of the federal poverty line), with a steady increase since 2007¹.

¹ All figures from the Kids Count Data Center, using census data - <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>.
A Century of Strengthening Children, Families, and Communities

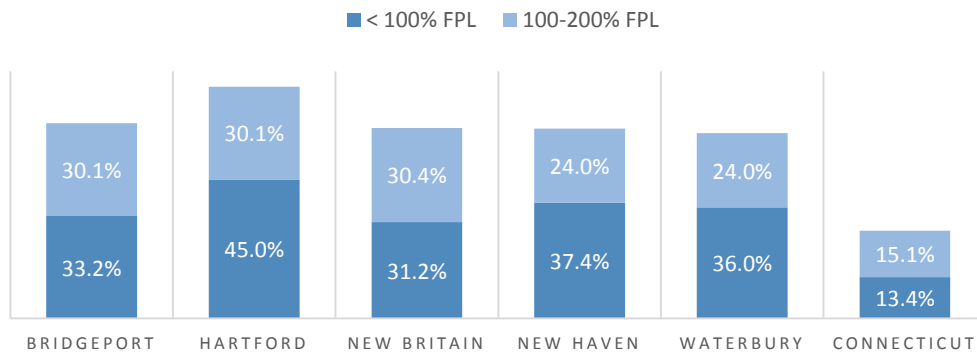
The numbers are even more troublesome if we look at them closer, breaking them down by town and race. In 2013, while 6% of non-Hispanic white children live in poverty, 28% of African-American children and 33% of Hispanic were growing up in poor families. The disparities are even more marked for low-income families, with 16% of white children living in low-income households,



compared to 55% African-America or 62% White.

Poverty is also heavily concentrated. Child poverty rates in our largest cities often exceed 30%. Just outside the door of this building, in the capital city of the wealthiest state in the nation, Hartford,

LOW INCOME CHILDREN IN CT



child poverty stands at 45%.

The need for social services is still great. Even with the economic recovery many families are struggling to make ends meet. These families and their children still need our help; they need to be able to access to income supports and services to be able to make ends meet and start moving ahead.

For the past few years many of these work supports have been weakened. Connecticut has reduced access to health insurance for some low-income parents, slashed Medicaid payments, frozen

payments to service providers and funding for programs like Care 4 Kids. The cuts could have been much worse, and we thank the legislature for your efforts to preserve core services. It is clear, however, that these services are still necessary, and that across the board cuts will end up hurting those that have benefited the least from the economic recovery.

As a result, we ask the General Assembly and the Appropriations Committee to assert your authority over the budget process, and continue your efforts to protect the safety net, preserving core services and programs that serve the most vulnerable. We understand that we are facing a tough budget, and the legislature needs to make difficult choices regarding spending. After years of economic recovery, we believe that any cuts and sacrifices should fall on those that have reaped most of the benefits from economic growth, not those that are being left behind.

We trust that this committee and the General Assembly will play a leading role ensuring that funding is allocated to the right programs in an accountable and transparent manner.

Thank you for your consideration.