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Good Afternoon Chairman Morris and Members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus,

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. We appreciate the opportunity to present our policy direction for this legislative session and as we move towards the future.

The Opportunity Gap, Racial and Ethnic Disparity in Connecticut

CAHS believes that if we are going to turn the curve on poverty and truly be a state where all families have the opportunity to be economically secure, then we must address the extreme racial, ethnic and economic disparities that exist in Connecticut. While poverty and economic instability impacts families of all backgrounds, data informs us that the overwhelming majority of low-income children in Connecticut are children of color.¹ We know that in Connecticut there is a distinct disparity in the poverty levels of children of color as compared to those of white non-Hispanic heritage. The most recent Kids Count report, *Race for Results* informs us that over the past 25 years, childhood poverty has increased by 50%. While 6% of white children live in poverty, 28% of black children and 33% of Latino children live below the federal poverty level. In addition, while 16% of white children live under 200% of the federal poverty level, 55% of Black children and 62% of Latino children live in low income households.²

We know that when families are subjected to the stressors of poverty, this has an enormous effect on children. The stressors are many: inflexible and unpredictable jobs, unstable family environments, poor housing, unsafe neighborhoods, and insufficient income. For those parents who lack education, there is little opportunity to change their work options. Childcare is rarely available for parents attending school or long term workforce training programs that would allow them to obtain higher paying employment opportunities in growth sectors. The struggle to manage from day to day leads to inordinate amounts of stress on parents and subsequently on their children. As the poverty figures show, minority families and children are much more likely to be faced with these challenges.

Two-Generational Approaches to Family Economic Success

We know that early experiences are essential for a strong early start for children; however, children don't live outside the context of their family. In fact research tells us that a mother's level of educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of children's success.³ By focusing only on the children, without consideration for the adults in their lives, we only are addressing half a solution towards the elimination of the achievement gap, generational poverty and racial and economic equity.

¹ <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6726-children-below-200-percent-poverty-by-race>

² (The Annie E. Casey foundation , 2014)

³ (Ascend at the Aspen Institute, 2012),(Hernandez, 2014)

Parents are crucial to a family's ability to move out of poverty, but for many of the most-in-need parents, lack of education and illiteracy obstruct their personal and economic success, limit the literacy skills of their children, provide an atmosphere of stress and contribute to the cycle of poverty.

CAHS believes that we need to look at and do things differently if we're going to turn the curve on trends in poverty, and child poverty in particular. We must address the educational and economic needs of both parent and child together.

We believe we need to start looking at ways to align systems, policy and program from a Two - Generational lens. To be clear, Two-Generation initiatives by themselves are not new. Connecticut has many wonderful and successful two -generational programs that provide needed supports and serve our families well. However, most do not intentionally address *family economic success* by providing for the educational needs of children in conjunction with the educational and workforce training needs for the adults. Rarely do programs assess the progress of both parent and child towards family outcomes. Our policies often do not allow for a strong connected approach and our underlying system does not connect in a way that is family friendly. We are left with a "system" of disconnected programs, each with its own point of entry, eligibility requirements and paper trail and the policies that inform our programs often are at odds with true family success.

CAHS has been collaborating with our national partners, The Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Working Poor Families Project, who have been researching and promoting ways in which communities can align existing systems policies and programs in a collaborative model to provide a comprehensive approach to family success. In Connecticut we are specifically we are interested in:

- Programs: How can we use our existing networks of successful programs and influence a collaborative approach to family economic success?
- Policies: How can we align policies to address the needs of both children and adults as a family unit? How do our policies support collaboration between programs?
- Systems: How can we improve our present system to both support our programs and families with an approach that is easy to navigate and family friendly?
- Assessment and Evaluation- How are we going to measure results to ensure we are turning the curve?

Nationally, Connecticut is one of a handful of states on the cutting edge of Two- Generation initiatives. As you may know, during the 2014 Legislative Session the Commission on Children was charged with convening a Two- Generation workgroup to research and assess the merits of this approach. CAHS has been part of this workgroup and will be working closely with the Commission to advance this work during the 2015 legislative session and as we move forward.

We would welcome the opportunity to work more intentionally with the Caucus on this initiative. Additionally, we have interest, post session in collaborating with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to define longer term priorities to reduce educational and economic racial disparities towards the goal of family economic opportunity and success for all Connecticut's families.