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## **Testimony before the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus**

*Elizabeth Fraser, Policy Manager, Connecticut Association for Human Services, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016*

Good afternoon Chairman Rosario and Members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus,

My name is Elizabeth Fraser, and I am the Policy Manager for 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. We appreciate the opportunity to present our policy direction for this legislative session and as we move towards the future.

We realize that this will be a very difficult budget year and that legislators will be making decisions impacting all Connecticut residents. In general CAHS is especially concerned with:

- **Possible cuts to safety net programs that protect our low-income families.**
- **Fully funding early childhood, ensuring that a strong, coordinated, and sustainable system of early care is available to serve all children and families.**
- **Support for two-generation programs including: the coordination of systems and programs allowing families to be served as a unit, allowing parents to attain a level the education or training necessary to attain secure and sustainable employment, children to thrive in quality early childhood environments and families to have the ability to rise out of poverty.**
- **The ability to disaggregate state data on children and families so that there is transparency in how our children and families are faring.**

### **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 stability impacts families of all backgrounds, data informs us that children of color are disproportionately likely to live in low-income families.<sup>1</sup>

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

We know that in Connecticut there is a distinct disparity between the poverty levels of children of color and those of Non-Hispanic White 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 14% of White children live under 200% of the federal poverty level, 56% of Black children and 61 % of Latino children live in low income households.<sup>2</sup>

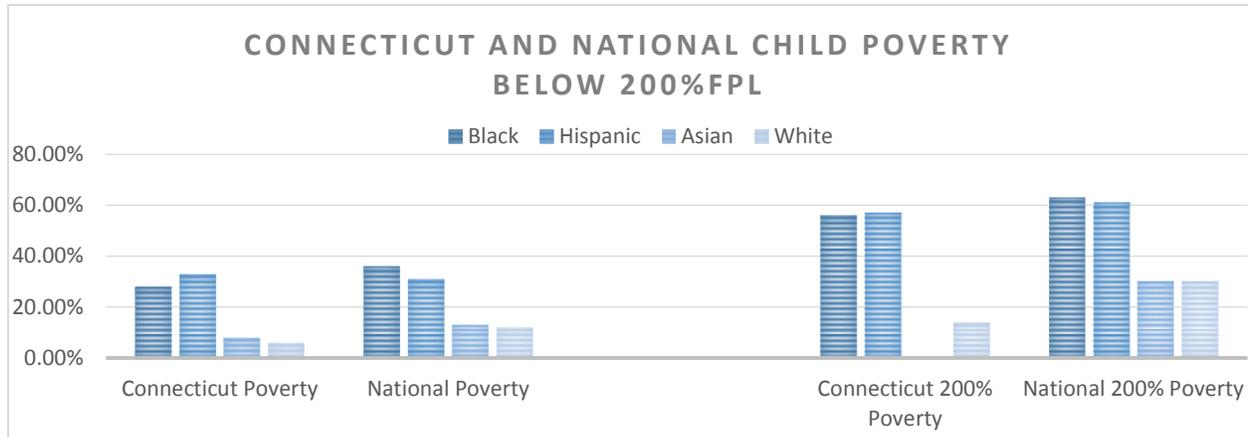


Figure 1: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6726-children-below-200-percent-poverty-by-race>

Given this disparity, we are especially concerned with cuts to safety net programs. We know that the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus will be vigilant in the effort to keep social service cuts to a minimum. We want to assure you of our partnership in this effort.

### Disaggregation of Data

CAHS will soon be releasing the Annie E. Casey 2016 Kids Count Race for Results data book. In this report, we compared five Connecticut regions along 13 data measures to explore how children’s and families’ outcomes differ by race and ethnicity. In the National Kids Count profile, Connecticut is listed among the top states in the country for child outcomes. However, we know that statewide measures do not tell the entire story and disaggregated data indicates that children of color fare far worse than their Non-Hispanic White counterparts. This underscores the importance of the availability of disaggregated data.

In preparing the report, we often found it difficult to find complete disaggregated data from state agencies. Some of this was due to agencies collecting racial and ethnic data in different ways. For example, because residents are listed by race *and* ethnicity, Hispanics who identify as White might be listed as White in some cases and Hispanic in others. This makes it difficult to compare the statistics of Hispanics and Whites. **A solution to this is to require all state agencies to collect, track, and report race and ethnic data in accordance to the federal reporting guidelines, in which racial and ethnic groups are delineated in a uniform fashion.**

Another obstacle to collecting disaggregated data is *suppression*, a practice designed to protect the privacy of residents in highly-detailed population data. Agencies set a minimum threshold for

<sup>2</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation , 2014.

reporting, and any count falling below the minimum is not reported. Because most towns in CT are majority-White, groups of color are most likely to have their values suppressed in many town-level statistical counts. Yet, these are the groups who disproportionately face social and economic disadvantages, and are therefore the people for whom complete, highly detailed statistics are most important. **The solution CAHS supports is for agencies to use non-suppressed values to compute their totals for statistics of all residents, and if necessary to use units of measurement larger than towns, so that complete data for residents of color will be available.**

### Care4Kids Funding

In 2014 changes were made to the federal Child Care Development Block Grant, requiring that families that are no longer eligible for the subsidy are phased out over three months, as opposed to being immediately dropped from the program. Further, eligibility redeterminations now occur every 12 months, rather than every eight months. While these changes improve the stability of child care services, they also create a \$33 million funding deficit, which resulted in the program being closed in August to all but those families making less than 50% of the State Median Income (SMI) or \$54,296 a year for a family of four. This did not sufficiently mitigate the deficit, leading the program to close to all new enrollees with the exception of those receiving TANF funds. **The changes caused a decrease in enrollment between August and November. While decreases in enrollment are typical during these months, whether or not there is a budget crisis, in 2015 there was only a 7% (1501 children) decrease in enrollment, while 2016 saw a 16% (3576 children) in enrollment.**<sup>34</sup> This left many families without safe, reliable sources of child care and forcing parents to either stop working or to place their child in unsafe, unstable child care settings..

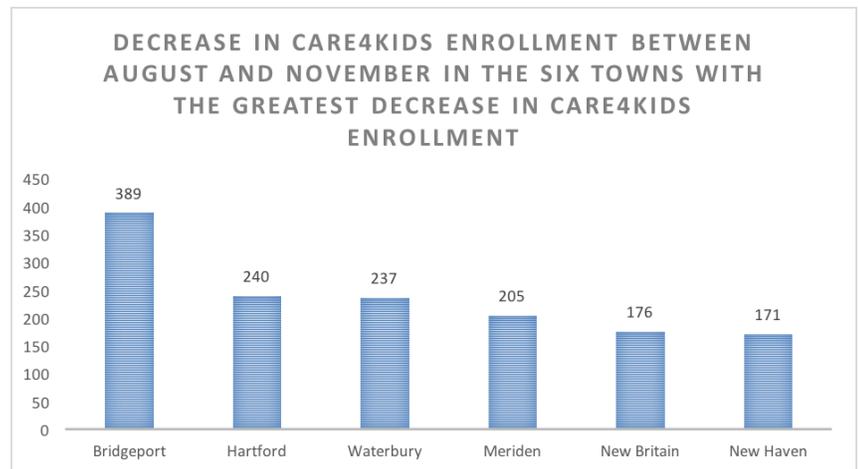


Figure 2: OEC Care4Kids Report August and October 2015, 2016

These drops have a disproportionate impact upon children of color. While the Care4Kids program does not collect useable data on the race or ethnicity of the children served, there is a very strong correlation between race and poverty in Connecticut. One half of all children subsidized under Care4Kids are located in just eight cities, and two-thirds of the Care4Kids caseload live in just 16 of Connecticut's 169 towns.<sup>5</sup> **Of the 16 communities that account for two thirds of the Care4Kids caseload, 15 of them are among the 18 communities in the state with the highest concentrations of**

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. (2016). *Number of Children Paid by Age Category and Service Setting, August, 2016*. [Data file]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctcare4kids.com/files/2016/07/August-2016.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. (2016). *Number of Children Paid by Age Category and Service Setting, November, 2016*. [Data file]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctcare4kids.com/files/2016/07/November-2016.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. (2016). *Number of Children Paid by Age Category and Service Setting, May, 2016*. [Data file]. Retrieved from: <http://www.ctcare4kids.com/files/2016/07/May-2016.pdf>.

Figure 3: ACS 5-Year Estimates 2015

**children of color and the six cities that saw the greatest drop in Care4Kids enrollment since August are comprised primarily of people of color. It is vitally important to adequately fund the Care4Kids program, in order to ensure that parents are able to work and children are able to receive high-quality, consistent child care services, allowing that the entire family is able to succeed. CAHS supports the Early Childhood Alliance in keeping early childhood programs in the Office of Early Childhood.**

### **Two-Generational Approaches to Family Economic Success**

CAHS believes we should continue the CT Two Generation Project that was passed into statute. The statute specifically requires that participating communities find avenues to family economic success by providing for both generations at a time. This includes providing education and employment opportunities for parents in coordination with early childhood experiences that will lead to strong school readiness for their children.

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. CAHS was fortunate to receive a WK Kellogg Foundation grant that is specifically intended to support the CT Two Generation project. The grant provides technical assistance, evaluation, and other supports to the five participating communities and to promote systemic change at the state and local level.

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?

The communities have been through a planning process and are now engaged in their individual projects. Two communities are working on local systems change toward two generation outcomes. Three are working with families and exploring ways we might serve families more efficiently and with stronger outcomes. The project workgroup is in the process of finalizing a method of evaluation that will document and analyze the results of the projects. Initial results will be available in a report due in July, 2017.

We would welcome the opportunity to work more intentionally with the Caucus on these initiatives. 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.