



Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Republican Members of the Finance, Revenue  
and Bonding Committee Informational Hearing May 11, 2015  
Testimony submitted by Lucy Potter, Attorney  
Greater Hartford Legal Aid

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid and have represented many clients who seek cash and medical help from DSS. I am counsel in Briggs v. Bremby, a case that seeks timely processing of food stamps benefits and Raymond v. Rowland, which seeks fair access to DSS for people with disabilities under a settlement agreement. I have been representing low income families and individuals in greater Hartford and coming here to testify on their behalf for 30 years.

We face a daunting budget deficit, but we also are a state with a long history of commitment to supporting those who need help. The governor's budget proposed deep cuts particularly to the HUSKY program, reducing income limits and provider rates. His budget would also eliminate funding for a range of programs that help people at the local level around the state: Healthy Start, the Human Service Infrastructure, Fatherhood and Teen Pregnancy Prevention, to name just a few of these. These are programs that meet people where they live and connect them to training, counseling, work opportunities and other supports needed to help people get their lives on track.

The Republican proposal partially restores some of these cuts, but relies on concessions from the state employee unions for several hundred million dollars of the savings required to achieve this. The unions have already made concessions in past years and regardless of the wisdom of the proposed concessions, they could not be made within the timeframe needed for this budget. The Appropriations and Finance Committee proposals restored most of the Governor's proposed cuts and also addressed the revenue needed to fund them in a fair way. The proposal would increase the income tax rates for the highest income earners by 3/10 of a percent and add a 2% tax on capital gains. It would also broaden the sales tax and require combined reporting for corporations as other New England states do.

Over the many years that I have been advocating here at the legislature, there have been shifts in the economy and shifting approaches to how this state supports those struggling at the lowest end of our economy. Most dramatically, in the mid-90's we passed time limited family assistance, cutting the number of families receiving cash support from the state by 2/3. But there was also a commitment to continuing to help those families make it in the workforce with a robust plan for medical assistance and other work supports.

As we recover from the most recent economic downturn, the evidence is very clear that those with the highest incomes have experienced much stronger recoveries. Meanwhile the percentage of children in poverty in Connecticut increased from 12.8% in 2008-2010 to 14.7% in 2011-2013. The proposed Finance and Appropriations budgets reflect this reality by seeking a modest increase in taxes from the highest income tax payers so that we can maintain support for the lowest earners to meet their basic human needs. I appreciate the Republican efforts to partially spare cuts to social services programs, but believe that the approach to paying for it is not achievable. The Finance and Appropriations Committee proposals are a measured and fair approach to continuing this State's commitment to helping those who need their community's support in order to survive.

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