

Connecticut Commission on
Women, Children *and* Seniors



CWCS

Testimony before the Committee on Human Services of the General Assembly
Submitted by Steven Hernández, Executive Director
Commission on Women, Children and Seniors
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Re: SB 774, An Act Extending Temporary Family Assistance Benefits to Encourage Employment
HB 7006, An Act Restoring Oversight of the Care 4 Kids Program to the Department of Social Services and Allowing for the Transfer of Federal Block Grant Funds to the Program
HB 7007, An Act Concerning an Innovation Incentive Program for Nonprofit Providers of Human Services

Senator Markley, and Senator Moore, and Representative Abercrombie, and distinguished members of the Committee on Human Services: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) on the above referenced bills.

SB 774, An Act Extending Temporary Family Assistance Benefits to Encourage Employment

The Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) supports SB 774, the intent of which is to encourage recipients of temporary family assistance to find employment *and to retain that employment*, despite a technical change in eligibility status, when abrupt termination of financial assistance might destabilize the family. A six-month extension in benefits is neither a handout nor a windfall, but simply an onramp to smooth the transition of newly working families to full independence from public assistance.

As has been noted elsewhere during this legislative session, the state's workforce development system is in need of review and overhaul, in part due to the existence of administrative barriers, including fiscal cliffs, which can penalize families – at very sensitive stages of their progress toward economic independence – for simply doing what they can to break the cycle of poverty. It seems only logical for the legislature to ensure the success of the state's innovative career pathways and other training programs by enabling program participants to conclude training and become established in gainful employment without undue pressure. The success of these families will benefit the entire state and its economy.

HB 7006, An Act Restoring Oversight of the Care 4 Kids Program to the Department of Social Services and Allowing for the Transfer of Federal Block Grant Funds to the Program

With regard to HB 7006, CWCS takes note of the special developmental needs of early childhood, which are different from the developmental needs of older children and call for a completely different set of expertise and awareness, both in the classroom and in administrative oversight, at all levels. It was recognition of the specificity of those needs, at least in part, that resulted in the formation of the Office of Early Childhood and in its eventual establishment as a free-standing executive agency. The Care 4 Kids Program, having charge of children only in early childhood, was placed with the Office of Early Childhood because that is where the expertise in early childhood issues resides within our state government.

While we recognize there are no easy answers as to how to maintain and sustain the Care 4 Kids Program, which is clearly an object of bipartisan support, CWCS offers some words of caution:

- The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) has been set a monumental task of aligning a number of funding streams and programs, each of which has its own history and limitations – some imposed by state legislation. OEC has been set that task at the same time that it has been beset by shrinking budgets and increasing demands at the federal level. Before the legislature undertakes to fix a problem that many great minds have yet to even define, we ought to be careful not to confound the signs of a burgeoning agency with signs of a failing one.
- For the OEC, the Care 4 Kids funding stream is among its largest sources of funds, and the agency has had to be particularly nimble in its response to rapidly changing federal initiatives. This context is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. If the Care 4 Kids funding stream returns to the Department of Social Services, in which very young children are but a small part of the population receiving services, their specific developmental needs may not retain the high priority they have at OEC. When a large agency has to make difficult decision in tough times, we should take care that our youngest children not become even more vulnerable. At OEC, whose sole charge is our youngest citizens, the agency has the expertise and awareness to make the most informed decisions about the allocation of the precious resources available for early childhood.

HB 7007, An Act Concerning an Innovation Incentive Program for Nonprofit Providers of Human Services

CWCS supports the concept of HB 7007. Human service contractors should be encouraged to provide the best possible services, most efficiently. The state should encourage them to be innovative in approach, and to constantly seek process improvements that will benefit our low- and moderate-income citizens. By encouraging reinvestment of savings into the provision of more services, the state is supporting innovation and increasing benefits, a desirable outcome particularly in difficult economic times.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comment today on these bills.