

**Testimony Supporting
Senate Bill 895: An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance**

Sharon D. Langer, M.Ed., J.D.

Human Services Committee

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Dear Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and Members of the Human Services Committee:

I am the Advocacy Director of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Voices for Children in support of S.B. 895, An Act Concerning Temporary Family Assistance. This testimony is grounded in research and knowledge about the important role that parents or other relative caregivers play in the lives of children from the moment they are born and through their ongoing development. It is also based on what we know about the toxic effects that poverty has on children, such as poor health and poor school performance, and in reducing their ability to be productive members of the work force. We now operate in a policy making environment that utilizes evidence based practices and strives to measure outcomes to determine the effectiveness of social programs to improve the lives of children and families. The original design of Connecticut's welfare program, however, was not grounded in research or data but a generalized belief that the welfare program itself was the problem causing disadvantaged families to remain stuck in poverty. We now know that the challenges that some of our poorest families in the state face are much more complicated and nuanced.

We applaud lawmakers and others in recognizing that we need to refocus our attention on "two-generational" approaches that enhance the "long-term economic success for low-income families."¹ As a former legal aid attorney for two decades, I saw first-hand the struggles that families face in paying rent, feeding and clothing their children, advancing their children's education, making due on temporary, part-time and/or minimum wage jobs, and meeting their own physical and/or behavioral health challenges. SB 895 would go a long way to improving the lives of both generations - the children and their parents - who rely on the Temporary Family Assistance program to meet their basic needs.

We support the following provisions that encourage education and work in the TFA program, and thereby will help improve the economic well-being of children and their parents:

- Assisting families that participate in education and training to make them job ready by removing the 21-month time limit on benefits for these families. Under current law, when education and training programs take over 21 months to complete, or families may enroll in such a program with only a few months of benefit eligibility remaining, families may lose TFA while the caregiver is still attending school. This

¹ See, Raised Bill No. 5832, (An Act Implementing a State-wide Coordinated Two-Generational Model," Connecticut General Assembly (February 2015), available at <http://cga.ct.gov/2015/TOB/H/2015HB-05823-R00-HB.htm> ; Testimony of Sarah Iverson, Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children, in support of Raised Bill No.5832, (February 5, 2015), available at <http://www.ctvoices.org>.

provision avoids penalizing families for working to increase their earning power. (Sec. 1 (b))

- Smoothing out the economic “cliff” that occurs at the end of the twenty-one month time-limit by permitting families to receive a reduced benefit instead of suddenly losing access altogether to the monthly TFA benefit. These cliffs can throw families suddenly back into deep poverty, and offer no opportunity to prepare for living on limited earned income.(Sec. 1.(c)(2))
- Including child care expenses as an additional disregard from income when determining initial financial eligibility for TFA and at the time of extensions . Childcare for very young children can cost over \$13,000 per child in Connecticut.² Disregarding childcare from income acknowledges that, for working parents of young children, childcare is a necessity, and prevents parents from making dangerous choices between working and finding adequate childcare for their children. (Sec. 1.(c))
- Ensuring that a parent on TFA is able to obtain a high school credential and requiring that employment participation activities, adult education and workforce training count as an allowable employment activity and so long as permitted by federal law. This policy ensures parents are not discouraged by the TFA program from completing their education and boosting their future earning power. (Sec. 2. (b))
- Redefining “incapacity” to allow a parent to work up to ten hours per week and not forfeit her exemption from the time limit and work requirement. Many persons with health challenges should be given as much flexibility as possible to work without fearing the loss of subsistence support. Having such a low-threshold for what constitutes work acts as a perverse disincentive to increase hours of employment and improve her family’s economic well-being. (Sec. 1.(b))

We also support eliminating the “family cap” provision that reduces the meager grant to families in which a child is conceived and born while on TFA. This long-standing and ill-advised provision punishes babies born to low-income mothers. (Sec. 1.(d))

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 895 to improve the TFA program and better enable struggling parents to economically support and nurture their children.

Feel free to contact me if you need additional information. I can be reached at slanger@ctvoices.org and (203) 490-4240 (x 121).

² See, “Childcare in America: 2014 State Fact Sheets.” *Childcare Aware of America*. Available at http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/19000000_state_fact_sheets_2014_v04.pdf.
Connecticut Voices for Children