



*Testimony before the  
Informational Forum on the Benefits Cliffs  
Co-Sponsored by the Human Services, Appropriations,  
Children's, Insurance, Labor, and Public Health Committees*

*Commissioner Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH  
January 30, 2020*

Good Morning Senators and Representatives.

My name is Deidre Gifford, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. I am pleased to be with you today.

DSS appreciates the opportunity to participate in this important conversation about “benefit cliffs.” We applaud the efforts of the legislature and the Governor to initiate this complex conversation across our government agencies, with our community partners, and with the families and individuals we serve. DSS strives to support Connecticut residents in their efforts to become self-sufficient and earn a living wage. Many of the programs we administer and the services we provide to families help ensure their basic health and welfare – one of the critical foundations for being able to earn and sustain a living wage.

We believe that it is vital to provide a transitional safety net to ensure that families, parents and other adults who are working hard to earn more income are not suddenly forced to choose between an employment opportunity and the loss of healthcare or basic nutrition for their children.

DSS is already taking steps within the agency to address this issue. These steps include:

- Offering Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) to most of our HUSKY A clients. This health coverage option, in partnership with the federal government, allows us to extend HUSKY benefits for up to a year to households with children who have earned income and have exceeded the eligibility income threshold.
  - As of our most recent month of data (Dec 2019), about 18,500 individuals have TMA coverage.
  - Approximately 420,000 HUSKY A recipients are members of households that could be eligible for TMA if they have earned income and exceed the income threshold.
  - TMA became an option for states in 1988. In order to incentivize employment and reduce the “cliff effect,” we have opted to provide the longest possible period of

coverage available to the largest range of population that we can cover under this coverage option.

- Opting to provide SNAP Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA) to our TFA clients. This state option ensures that TFA recipients who “earn off” of TFA continue to receive unchanged SNAP benefits for 5 months after the date their TFA benefits end.
  - As of our most recent month of data (Dec 2019), 572 individuals are receiving SNAP TBA.
  - DSS implemented TBA in 2016. We have opted to provide the longest possible period of benefit coverage permitted by the federal rules that govern SNAP.

While these are important steps, we know there is more that we can do when we work across state government. DSS is looking forward to expanding efforts to mitigate the cliff effect as part of the Governor’s workforce development initiative.

Simultaneously, DSS is meeting regularly with the Department of Labor to discuss ways that we can enhance our services to our shared clients who access the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program.

Lastly, we are exploring creative ways that we can support families and individuals to ensure their long-term financial success within the context of the TANF program, by revisiting old policies that were first instituted as part of “welfare reform” and evaluating their effectiveness at achieving our goals of supporting family self-sufficiency.

We look forward to working with you to implement solutions that address these important issues. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.