

GWEN SAMUEL, CONNECTICUT PARENTS UNION
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY DEPARTMENT OF LABOR JOB CENTER CLOSURES AND CONSOLIDATIONS
September 28, 2015

Good morning, Co-Chairperson Senator Goames and Representative Tercyak and Labor and Public Employees committee members. My name is Gwen Samuel. I am a Meriden resident, a public school parent and founder of the Connecticut Parents Union, an all volunteer membership organization established to connect parents, guardians and families with the resources and support necessary to effectively advocate for the educational rights of children. I also have the distinct pleasure of working with an education advocacy organization in New Haven called Teach Our Children and Youth Unleashed I am here today to express my opposition to any aspect of the Department of Labor Job service center closures and consolidations without an equity impact analysis because when the State of Connecticut catches a cold the black and poor communities get Pneumonia

In March of 2015, Economic Policy Institute reported, “The black unemployment rate during the first quarter of this year was at or below its pre-recession level in six states: Connecticut, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Tennessee, according to the analysis. But the rates in those states were also among the highest in the country before the recession.” “In ***Projected Decline in Unemployment in 2015 Won’t Lift Blacks Out of the Recession-carved Crater***, Economic Policy Institute economist Valerie Wilson finds that black unemployment levels remain higher than pre-recession levels in 28 states, even as unemployment rates for whites, Hispanics, and Asians have fallen to just above their pre-recession levels. And while the national white and Hispanic unemployment rates were each within 1 percentage point of their pre-recession levels in the fourth quarter of 2014, the national black unemployment rate was 2.4 percentage points higher than before the recession began.

Using a unique analysis of Current Population Survey data and Local Area Unemployment Statistics program data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, EPI estimated state unemployment rates by race and ethnicity in over 30 states. In 2014, the annual black unemployment rate was highest in Wisconsin (19.9 percent), Nevada (16.1 percent), Michigan (15.8 percent), and the District of Columbia (15.7 percent), out of 30 states for which data was available. Though black unemployment significantly declined in 15 states and the employment-to-population ratio increased in six states, blacks have returned to pre-recession unemployment rates in just two states—Connecticut and South Carolina.”

<http://www.epi.org/press/black-unemployment-is-still-higher-than-pre-recession-levels-in-28-states/>

With that said, my testimony focuses on the following points:

- Request of an Equity Impact Analysis to assess the disproportionate impact closing and/or consolidating Job Service center to vulnerable populations i.e. Black , poor, and rural communities including those with disabilities trying to enter the work force, long term unemployed and veterans in need of additional job training ;
- Concerns of a repeat of the Department of Social Service consolidations which resulted in a staffing shortage which in turn resulted in attorneys “seeking an injunction to stop the state from moving forward with plans that could cause up to 13,000 poor adults to lose health care coverage. They argue that the changes the state is pursuing could worsen delays in processing paperwork for all

Medicaid recipients and applicants.” In addition, DSS had issues with long call center wait times and clients being turned away

<http://ctmirror.org/2012/10/18/attorneys-seek-injunction-stop-medicaid-eligibility-changes/>

<http://ctmirror.org/2012/01/09/lawsuit-dss-understaffing-produces-illegal-delays-medicaid-applicants/>

<http://ctmirror.org/2014/04/15/proposed-settlement-reached-in-dss-medicaid-application-delay-lawsuit/>

- Review of the job descriptions and qualifications of the DOL employees that were laid off to ensure there are not specialized requirements of the federal grants received by the state for the Department of labor
- Concerns that small minority businesses will be excluded from consideration for state and or federal funding to provide similar services of the Department of Labor
- Concerns of poor implementation of the Second Chance Society law which was passed into law in Connecticut during the 2015 legislative session. We should note the Second Chance Act was passed at the federal level in 2008. Those potentially impacted by the DOL consolidations and closures will be those on probations, public assistance...
- What evaluation system will be in place to ensure effective services are being provided to clients of the Department of Labor consolidation efforts
- The need to reintroduce Senate Bill 667 in 2016 to prevent these types of proposals, with a potential to have adverse quality of life implications, to be introduced without an Equity Impact analysis.

AN ACT REQUIRING EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENTS FOR CERTAIN BILLS.

Statement of Purpose:

To permit the legislature to assess the impact of its policies and to ensure that both the intent and impact of such policies are consistent with the values of fairness and equity.

This bill was introduced by Senator Winfield on behalf of Connecticut families via New Haven’s education advocacy group Teach Our Children, Hartford Parents University and the Connecticut Parents Union

Context:

An analysis of the State of Connecticut using almost any indicator of socio-economic progress quickly reveals stark contradictions in the fortunes of its residents. Connecticut, one of the richest states in the nation is also home to some of the nation’s poorest cities; it is home to some of the most prestigious Universities and schools in the nation, yet its academic achievement gap is among the highest in the nation, observable between rich and poor students, and between white students and students of color. The socio-economically disadvantaged in Connecticut’s urban cities tend to be people of color, trapped in schools that persistently fail to meet their need for a quality education; these residents are also likely to be underemployed, or lacking in job skills that would provide a livable wage, consequently they tend to be under-insured, or uninsured.