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CABHN FEVER

Six DSS Offices Closed; How to Get the Help You Need from DSS

The Department of Social Services (DSS) has closed its regional offices in Ansonia, Bristol, Killingly, Meriden, Norwalk and Willimantic. As a result of a lawsuit brought by Legal Services organizations on behalf of clients affected by the closings, DSS has presented a written plan outlining how people in need of benefits or other DSS services, will be able to get them. The basic points in the plan are listed below:

1. Use mail and phone: For clients in the towns affected by the office closings, as much business as possible will be conducted by phone and mail. Toll-free phone numbers to DSS offices will be available to clients in the affected towns and DSS will provide postage paid envelopes for mailings on request.

2. Waive required in-person interviews : For many programs, there are provisions for waiving in-person interviews when the client can show good cause, as a result of disability, work schedules or transportation problems, for not being able to go to the office. These provisions have not been used very often in the past. For clients affected by office closings for the next three months, DSS workers have been instructed to accept the client's statement of inability to travel, without further verification, and waive the in-person interview.


3. Use home visits or designated representatives: When an in-person meeting is required and the client cannot go to the DSS office, a DSS worker will conduct a home visit or the client may designate someone to represent the client at the in-person interview.

4. Postpone redeterminations: For clients in affected towns for the next three months, DSS will postpone required redeterminations where possible under program rules.

5. Contact Community Action Agencies: Community Action Agencies in the affected towns have agreed to assist clients with disabilities who need help filling out forms, contacting DSS, faxing or copying documents and verifying identity for expedited Food Stamp applications. See chart on page 2 to determine the Community Action Agency in each of the affected towns.

6. Establish Disability Assistance Help Line: For people with disabilities, a special toll-free help line has been established. The number is 1-800-842-2159. For people with hearing disabilities, the TDD/TYY line is 1-800-842-4524.

IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS USING THE NEW SYSTEM, CONTACT LEGAL SERVICES (see chart for individual attorneys to contact). If you can't reach the individual listed immediately or aren't sure who to call, contact **Statewide Legal Services at 1-800-453-3320**. The judge in the lawsuit has indicated her willingness to review whether the plan is adequate if there is evidence of problems.❖



See Chart on Page 2:
Where To Go For Assistance If Your DSS Office Has Closed

Free Tax Filing Help for Low Income Taxpayers

If you worked in 2002 and are a low income wage earner, a Legal Assistance client or a Housing Authority resident you are probably eligible for some tax credits. This could reduce what you owe or increase your refund. So file early and file for free!

Locations for assistance:

New Haven Legal Assistance, 426 State Street, New Haven, CT (tel. 203.946.4811)

11:00 - 2:00 on:

Saturdays: 2/8, 2/15, 2/22, 3/1 & 3/22

Valley Legal Assistance TEAM Offices, 30 Elizabeth Street, Derby, CT

(tel. 860.736.5420)

Every Friday 1:30 - 4:30

(except February 14th and April 4th) ❖

More Winter Heating Assistance


Seniors, People with Disabilities and Families with Children to Benefit Immediately

DSS announced yesterday that federal funds have just been released to cover expanded winter heating assistance benefits to higher income households. Contingency Heating Assistance Program (CHAP) benefits are now available to households up to 60% of state median income (for example, monthly income up to \$2,150 for one person or \$3,474 for three people). The benefit amount will be the same this year as last year, a flat \$200 per household.

Emergency furnace repair funds are available for homeowners eligible for energy assistance with household income less than 150% of the federal

Continued, see HEATING, p.4

Where to go for Assistance if Your DSS Office has Closed

Closed DSS Office	Towns Affected	DSS Office for clients and Toll-Free Number	Community Action Agency - Contact Info	Legal Services Attorney - Contact Info 
Ansonia	Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Derby, Oxford, Seymour, Shelton	New Haven 194 Bassett St New Haven 06511 (203)974-8000	Susan George TEAM 30 Elizabeth St. Derby (203) 736-5420 x 1202	Joanne Gibau, NHLAA 426 State St New Haven (203)946-4811 ext. 142
Bristol	Avon, Canton, Simsbury, Farmington Bristol, Burlington, Plymouth, Southington	Hartford 3580 Main St Hartford 06120 (860)723-1000 New Britain 270 Lafayette St New Britain, CT 06053 (866)723-2591	Rose Bourgoin (860)582-2796, Nancy Micloskey (860)589-8623 or Awilda Verous (Espanol) (860) 584-2725x25 Bristol Community Organization 100 No. Main St. Bristol	Lucy Potter, GHLA 999 Asylum Avenue, Hartford (860)541-5002
Killingly	Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Killingly, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Thompson, Woodstock	Norwich 401 W. Thames Rd., Unit 102 Norwich, CT 06360 (800)473-8909	Patricia Woolwich ACCESS Agency 1315 Main St. Willimantic (860)450-7146	Shirley Bergert, CLS 872 Main St. Willimantic (860)456-1761 or 1-800-413-7796
Meriden	Meriden, Wallingford	New Haven 194 Bassett St New Haven CT 06511 (203)974-8000	Daisy Olivo New Opportunities, Inc 191 Pratt St. Meriden (203)235-0278x10	Sharon Langer (x108) or Caitlin Simon (x106) CLS 587 Main St New Britain (860)225-8678 or 1-800-233-7619
Norwalk	New Canaan, Wilton Norwalk, Weston, Westport	Stamford 1642 Bedford St. Stamford, CT 06905 (866)663-9300 Bridgeport 925 Housatonic Avenue Bridgeport, CT 06606 (877)551-2700	Sharon Stewart NEON Ben Franklin Elem 165 Flax Hill Rd. Norwalk (203)899-8589	Amy Marx - CLS 20 Summer St Stamford (203)348-9216 x 106 or 1-800-541-8909 Nadine Nevins-CLS 211 State St. Bridgeport (203)336-3851 or 1-800-809-4434
Willimantic	Ashford, Chaplin, Columbia, Coventry, Hampton, Mansfield, Scotland, Union, Willington, Windham, Willimantic	Norwich 401 W. Thames Rd., Unit 102 Norwich, CT 06360 (800)473-8909	Patricia Woolwich ACCESS Agency 1315 Main St. Willimantic (860)450-7146	Shirley Bergert, CLS 872 Main St. Willimantic (860)456-1761 or 1-800-413-7796



- Federal & State Policy

Unemployment Benefits (Federal)

On January 8 President Bush signed into law an extension of unemployment benefits. In CT this means anyone who was cut from the 13-week extension on December 28, 2002 before their 13 weeks ran out is eligible for the remainder of the 13 weeks. Also, anyone who uses up their regular 26 weeks of unemployment benefits may be eligible for 13 weeks of extension benefits. **So long as the person applies before May 31, 2003 they can get the full 13 weeks of benefits.** The extension benefits will not end on May 31st unless the person has received 13 weeks of benefits before that date.

So far the federal government has not passed a second unemployment extension. Many people who have used up their 39 weeks of unemployment benefits are still without a job. Call your federal legislators and the President and tell them to pass another unemployment extension.

To find your state Senator and State Representative, go to:

<http://www.cga.state.ct.us/maps/townlist.asp>

Here are examples of how the federal unemployment extension works:

1) Ms. Smith had received 6 weeks of the extension benefits when they stopped at the end of December. If Ms. Smith is still without a job, she can reapply for the extension back to December 29, 2002. She is eligible for up to 7 weeks of extension benefits (6 + 7 = 13 weeks).

2) Mr. Brown, on the other hand, used up all 13 weeks of benefits before the end of December. He is still unemployed. He is out of luck since he is not eligible for any additional weeks of benefits.

3) Ms. Jones used up her 26 weeks of regular unemployment benefits. She is still without a job. She can apply for the 13-week extension. As long as she applies before May 31, 2003, she can get up to 13 weeks of extension benefits. Her benefits won't automatically end on May 31st unless she received all 13 weeks. ❖

State Budget Update

As of this writing (January 28), there has been no legislative action on the state budget and no resolution to the negotiations between state employee unions and the Governor. A vote on the Governor's proposal to balance this year's budget is expected in the legislature this week. It is unlikely that this proposal will pass. The Democrats have been working on an alternative proposal but do not have a final proposal.

The Governor is scheduled to announce his proposed budget for the coming two years (July, 2003 through June, 2005) on February 19.

It is important to continue to contact legislators with the message that:

1. This is a revenue problem, not a spending problem. The solution is revenue increases not more cuts to vital services.

2. We should adopt a Fair Share Budget which draws resources from those who have resources, particularly corporations and wealthy individuals. ❖

EBT Card Change

As part of the Governor's Executive Order to cut all contract expenditures by 5%, the Department of Social Services (DSS) has decided to cut the number of free transactions on DSS clients' Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card from four to two free transactions per month. Anything above two transactions will cost a client \$0.85 per transaction. This change goes into effect on February 1st. All DSS clients should have gotten a notice of this change in the mail on or about January 21st, 2003. However, if the client makes a grocery/food stamp purchase with the EBT card they can get "cash back" with no additional charge.

Generally when someone has a problem with the EBT card or services, they should call the number on the back of their card, 1-888-328-2666. If that doesn't work, they should call their DSS worker. If the card is lost or stolen, they need to report it immediately to their DSS worker - if stolen, they also need to report it to the police right away. ❖

Center for Women Policy Studies

The Center for Women Policy Studies conducted a comprehensive analysis of the TANF implementation statutes in all 50 states and found that 49 states and the District of Columbia include some form of postsecondary education as an allowable work activity for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF).

However, most states require that TANF recipients education be directly linked to jobs and most restrict college access to two years or less. Only 19 states and the District of Columbia allow college to count as work for more than two years. The Center's mission is NOT to end welfare as we know it but rather to put a dent in women's and children's poverty.

(See Education, page 4)

Call Your Legislator



House Democrats	1-800-842-8267
House Republicans	1-800-842-8270
Senate Democrats	1-800-842-1420
Senate Republicans	1-800-842-1421
Governor's Office	1-800-406-1527

Heating (Cont'd from p. 1)
poverty level (for example, monthly income up to \$1108 for one person or \$1878 for three people).

Contact **Infoline at 211 or the local Community Action Agency** to find the location of the nearest application site. The deadline to apply for energy assistance is April 30th, but the program may close down earlier if funds run out. Call to make an appointment to apply today to increase the chances of receiving this benefit. ♦

Education (Cont'd from p. 3)

The Center's argument for postsecondary education as an effective route out of poverty for many women and its analyses of state policy should provide support for advocates, policy makers, and service providers who will urge the 108th Congress to provide states the flexibility they need to allow low income women to gain access to college rather than to restrict them to low wage insecure work that will leave them in poverty. For copy, go to www.centerwomenpolicy.org ♦

Housing Campaign Coordinator Needed

The Partnership for Strong Communities is looking for a manager to run a campaign that will result in civic and political support for increasing the supply of good housing that is affordable for people of low and moderate incomes in Connecticut.

For more information, call (860) 247-4322. To Apply: Send resume with cover letter to Diane Randall, Partnership for Strong Communities, 32 Grand Street, Hartford, CT 06106, email Diane@ctpartnershiphousing.com or fax to (860) 247-4320. ♦

Please Note...

Because of the importance of providing information to people affected by the DSS office closings, several articles submitted for this month's CABHN Fever could not be included in this edition. We apologize to those who submitted articles and will do our best to include them in next month's edition. Thank you!

Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT and CABHN (Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs)
80 Jefferson Street
Hartford, CT 06106

CABHN Meetings held 2nd Friday of the month

10 - Noon

Upcoming

Friday February 14th

**Access Agency
1315 Main Street**

Willimantic, CT 06226

*Please don't park in 1st or 2nd
lane directly in front of building*

Topics:

Legislative Update & More

Friday March 14th

**Community Renewal Team
555 Windsor St., Hartford**

The Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs (CABHN) is a statewide network of individuals, community groups and organizations which supports and promotes advocacy on low-income issues. For more information, please call (860) 278-5688.

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