



Connecticut Department of Social Services

NEWS RELEASE

**STATE TAKES ACTION TO PROTECT COMMUNITY SERVICES IN
NORWALK AND STAMFORD AREAS;
CITES NEON AS 'AGENCY IN CRISIS,' PLANS FOR POSSIBLE RE-
CONTRACTING OF SERVICES**

State Social Services Commissioner Roderick L. Bremby today announced a series of measures aimed at the safeguarding the integrity and continuity of taxpayer-funded services in the Norwalk and Stamford areas, after repeated attempts to assist the NEON community action agency in its latest financial difficulties.

“The Department of Social Services continues to provide technical assistance and resources to assist NEON in overcoming its serious fiscal and operational problems,” Commissioner Bremby said. “However, it has become increasingly clear that this is an organization in severe crisis, and the time has come to take stronger action. Today, I am announcing a series of measures designed to help NEON recover through a comprehensive quality improvement plan. At the same time, we need to set the wheels in motion to contract with other community agencies to provide these critical services, if necessary.”

Specifically, DSS is:

- designating NEON as an ‘agency in crisis’;
- requiring a series of deliverables (steps) that NEON must fulfill, in accordance with an agreed-upon Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). A QIP identifies deficiencies and proposes plans to address such deficiencies. The first deliverable is due October 31, 2013;
- preparing designation of other entity(ies) to receive federal Social Services Block Grant and Hispanic Human Development program services funding;
- preparing legal groundwork toward possible decertification of NEON as a Community Action Agency, if necessary, while reviewing steps that would certify other entity(ies) to receive federal Community Services Block Grant funding;
- preparing groundwork for another entity to handle vendor payments for the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) program;
- issuing a comprehensive Audit of Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now Inc. Financial Position as of June 30, 2013, with a request for comments back from NEON within two weeks. The audit was provided to NEON interim executive leadership and board of directors October 8.

DSS has traditionally played a key role in supporting Connecticut's vital network of anti-poverty community action agencies (CAAs). From delivering federal funding streams to contracting for winter heating assistance to providing technical assistance and fostering state-funded partnership initiatives, DSS has worked closely with CAAs on behalf of residents of all ages statewide.

"Our mutual clients and customers are best served when these parallel systems in the public and private sectors are working collaboratively and effectively – with careful stewardship of taxpayer dollars," noted Commissioner Bremby.

For nearly two years, in conjunction with the Connecticut Association for Community Action, DSS has provided assistance, facilitation and resources to help mitigate serious fiscal and operational challenges facing Community Action Agencies in lower Fairfield County.

Under exigent circumstances, a merger between Stamford's CTE and Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now (NEON) was supported to try to reverse an untenable situation with shared programming and other economies of scale.

"Department of Social Services involvement in this merger and afterward was critical in shoring up the CAA infrastructure in lower Fairfield County when it was at severe risk of collapse," said Commissioner Bremby. "The process continues, and ultimate success will depend on the hard work and dedication of community residents, staff, volunteers and leaders."

###

Contact: David Dearborn
860-424-5024;
david.dearborn@ct.gov

October 11, 2013

Related Story:

[DOC: Formal Notification Sent to Terminate State Contract with Norwalk Economic Opportunities NOW, Inc. \(NEON\): Offenders Relocated to Appropriate Program Locations](#)

The Connecticut Department of Correction has initiated measures to dissolve a longstanding contract for residential services with Norwalk Economic Opportunities NOW, Inc. (NEON), who currently operates a twenty-seven bed male work release program in Norwalk, an eighteen bed female work release program in Norwalk, as well as a twenty bed women and children program in Waterbury.