

1994-1995

Digest of Connecticut Administrative Reports to the Governor

Department of Social Services

JOYCE A. THOMAS, *Commissioner*

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Established - 1993 *Statutory Authority* - Title 17b, Chapters
319o to 319yy, inclusive, Conn. Gen. Stat.

Central Office - 25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, Conn. 06106-5033

Number of Employees - 2,377

Recurring Operating Expenses - \$144,089,430

Structure - Commissioner's Office, Programs Division,
Administrative Division, Health Care Financing Division

Agency Mission

The mission of the Department of Social Services is to serve families and individuals who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living.

Statutory Responsibility

The Department of Social Services is designated as the state agency for the administration of (1) the child care development block grant pursuant to the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990; (2) the Connecticut energy assistance program pursuant to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Act of 1981; (3) programs for the elderly pursuant to the Older Americans Act; (4) the state plan for vocational rehabilitation services for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1994; (5) the refugee assistance program pursuant to the Refugee Act of 1980; (6) the legalization impact assistance program pursuant to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986; (7) the aid to families with dependent children program pursuant to Title IV-A of the Social Security Act; (8) the JOBS program pursuant to Title IV-F of the Social Security Act; (9) the Medicaid program pursuant to Title XIX of the Social Security Act; (10) the food stamp program pursuant to the Food Stamp Act of 1977; (11) the state supplement to the Supplemental Security Income Program pursuant to the Social Security Act; (12) the state child support enforcement plan pursuant to Title IV-D of the Social Security Act; and (13) the state social services plan for the implementation of the social services block grants and community services block grants

pursuant to the Social Security Act. The Department of Social Services is designated a public housing agency for the purpose of administering the Section 8 existing certificate program and the housing voucher program pursuant to the Housing Act of 1937.

The department is a caring and responsive organization that effectively and efficiently delivers the highest quality of benefits and services to help its customers improve the quality of their lives and achieve and maintain maximum self-sufficiency.

Public Service

The Child Support Enforcement Program has improved customer service by implementing "VOICES," an automated child support information system accessed by touch-tone telephones; establishing and implementing the Child Support Information and Problem Resolution Unit; issuing a new bilingual version of the comprehensive brochure, "Child Support--A Guide to Services in Connecticut"; and issuing updated child support and arrearage guidelines.

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services provided services to 10,204 individuals. Services included diagnostic evaluation, vocational counseling and guidance, assistive technology, physical and mental restoration, vocational and other training services, supported employment services and assistance in finding and maintaining employment. A total of 1,222 persons with disabilities were rehabilitated into employment, including 1,157 who entered the competitive work force; of those 91.2 percent had severe disabilities. The bureau processed 38,000 applications for Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income.

The Organizational and Skill Development unit completed one customer survey and plans another as part of the implementation of welfare reform. The surveys will help the department in its goal to provide excellent customer service.

The Elderly Services Division coordinates the state's aging network. That network includes: elderly nutrition projects, social service providers, municipal agents, transportation programs, homemaker and home health aides, meals-on-wheels providers, escort and companion services, senior centers, adult day care centers, elderly and congregate housing projects, health screening projects, hospices, hospitals, nursing homes, visiting nurses, support groups, self-help organizations, family counseling services, educational projects, volunteer and employment programs and specialized providers.

The division also sets goals for the operation of the aging network and monitors its performance to assure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations. The federal Administration on Aging established new reporting guidelines under the National Aging Program Information System. It is designed to increase uniformity in data collection and improve the monitoring of state programs and analysis of performance. The division was actively engaged in upgrading the state's reporting system to meet the new federal requirements.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program advocates provided a bridge between nursing home staff and residents and families to foster communication so that problems can be worked out.

The Center for Medicare Advocacy, under contract to the Department of Social Services, responded to calls for information and assistance and helped clients review Medicare claims and requests for reconsideration, appeal and/or lawsuits on behalf of seniors denied benefits. The department also contracted with the Legal Assistance to Medicare Patients division of Connecticut Legal Services to provide a hot line and services to Medicare hospital beneficiaries.

The department awarded a \$38,000 grant to four community action agencies to support Families in Training, a family-focused program which encourages parents to see themselves as their child's primary teacher. Services include home visits, parenting classes and developmental assessments of the children.

The department oversees \$950,000 in funding for a Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Program to address the complex social problems in seven target areas: New Haven, New Britain, New London, Waterbury, Norwalk, Stamford and the rural northeastern part of the state.

Homelessness continued as a top priority for the department with grants and technical assistance for local services. Some 42 emergency shelters, with a total of 1,600 beds, received funding and served 17,000 persons; three day shelters and nine programs that provide advocacy, networking housing and health services were also funded. Emergency shelter funding reached nearly \$8.3 million during the 1994-95 period. The

department's eviction prevention program continued to offer mediation and rent bank services statewide, helping more than 2,100 families remain in permanent housing. Expenditures for the rent bank program reached \$950,000 and expenditures for mediation services reached \$523,568. The security deposit expenditures reached \$398,532, and state funds of \$1,347,899 were provided for the transitional program which provides a bridge between shelters and permanent housing.

The Section 8 Rental Assistance Program administered \$17,500,000 in federal funds to assist low income families obtain decent, safe and sanitary housing by providing rental subsidies directly to property owners. Rental assistance was used for existing housing, newly constructed units and in moderately or substantially rehabilitated units.

The Rental Assistance Program used state funds to support subsidies for low income families living in privately owned rental housing and for elderly persons residing in state-assisted rental housing for the elderly.

The AIDS Residence Program coordinated 20 nonprofit organizations and the Connecticut AIDS Residence Coalition to provide housing and support services for children and adults with AIDS. Projects are funded in Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven, Stamford, Danbury, New London, Plainville, Georgetown, Bloomfield and Windham. The department administered \$1,331,000 in federal funds from the Department of Health and Urban Development under the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS program. State bond funds to purchase and renovate AIDS residence programs are also administered by the department.

The Department of Social Services contracted with nonprofit groups to provide shelter services to victims of domestic violence and offer community education programs to the general public. Services included emergency shelter, security deposit assistance, counseling, advocacy, a 24-hour hot line and information and referral. The department provided operating funds for 225 beds in 16 shelters and general fund expenditures during the reporting period reached \$1.5 million.

Grants totaling \$450,000 were awarded by the department to nonprofit organizations for counseling services to families, adults and children who have experienced abuse and other family-related trauma under the Family Crisis Intervention Program.

The agency also administered a \$71,250 grant under the Home Share Program to a private nonprofit agency to find affordable housing for single-parent families by matching clients with other clients with whom they then combine resources.

Job Connection Child Care provided child care payments to enable parents receiving public assistance to participate in approved education and training programs. Payment is based on the market rate for the type of care required and is subject to a statewide limit of \$325 per month, per child, or \$435 per month, per child for children with special needs. This program required no family contribution toward the cost of care. During the past year, this program served an average of 2,540 families with 4,100 children per month.

Work Related Child Care provided child care payments to enable parents in unsubsidized employment who are receiving public assistance to continue to work. Payment is based on the market rate for the type of care required and is subject to statewide limits of \$325 and \$425 per month, like the Job Connection Child Care Program. This program requires no family contribution toward the cost of care. During the past state fiscal year, this program served an average of 2,219 families with 3,500 children per month.

Transitional Child Care is administered in a "standard" version which follows established federal rules and an "enhanced" version for those participating in the department's federally approved welfare reform waiver. In the standard program, benefits are limited to 12 months, and payments are capped at \$325 or \$435 per month, per child. In the enhanced program, benefits are not time limited; those families remain eligible as long as the need for child care continues and their gross income is less than 75 percent of the state's median income guidelines. All families are required to contribute toward the cost of care: standard program families pay a flat fee based on a poverty-level income schedule; enhanced program families are charged between two and 10 percent of their gross annual income based on the state median income. During the reporting period, these programs served an average 1,500 families with 2,400 children per month.

The Child Care Certificate Program authorizes monthly child care payments on behalf of low- or moderate-income families in which the parents are working or are teenagers completing high school. Parents pay a percentage of their income toward the child care costs and the department pays the balance, up to established

market rates which are based on hours, type of care and geographic region. Additional payments may be made if there are extra costs associated with serving a child with special needs. Payment is made directly to child care providers after service is rendered. During the past year, this program served an average of 4,300 families with 6,880 children per month.

The Department of Social Services administers two business tax credit subsidy programs that encourage employer support of child care. The Child Day Care Subsidy Program permits a business to receive a tax credit up to 50 percent of its contribution to its employees' child care costs. Credits are limited to care provided by licensed child care providers unless the care is offered in the child's home, the home of a close relative or other places exempted by the Department of Public Health. During 1994-95, 37 businesses were granted \$931,214 in credits in support of 1,047 employees and their 1,447 children.

The other program, Child Care Facility, allows a business to receive a credit up to 40 percent of its cost to establish a child day care center on or near the work site. Credits may be granted for planning, site preparation, construction, renovation or acquisition of child care facilities and may include the cost of things purchased in support of the facility, such as kitchen and playground equipment. The credit may not exceed \$20,000 in any one tax year and businesses regularly engaged in the construction or operation of child day care facilities are not eligible. One business was granted a credit of \$5,186.53.

The department provided contracts and technical assistance to municipalities, community action agencies and other nonprofit organizations to develop and operate child care centers that provide safe, age-appropriate environments and a full range of social, educational, recreational and nutritional services to children and support services to their families. Working parents and those attending job education or training programs, who have low or moderate incomes, are given priority in enrollment.

The contractors use a statewide fee schedule to decide a family's cost of care. At full fee, families obtaining full-day infant and toddler services are charged \$145 per week, families receiving full-day preschool services are charged \$124 per week and families receiving full-day school-age services are charged \$114 per week. Family fees are based on the service type, family size and gross income. The department made grants-in-aid to 39 contractors for 4,200 full-day, full-year slots at more than 90 locations. Also, 25 contractors provided preschool services exclusively, three provide infant and toddler and preschool services, six provide preschool and school-age services and the remaining five provide all three types of service. Approximately 12,000 children were served in these programs.

The department provided contracts to support the enhancement of school-age child care, including: increasing availability through new programming, expansion to additional sites or adding hours and/or days of operation; improving quality through the purchase of equipment or supplies, increasing staff salaries and/or fringe benefits, providing for professional development and technical support, pursuing accreditation or self-evaluation efforts, hiring multi-cultural staff or augmenting services to children and families; maintaining affordability through the direct funding of program operations. The department provided \$1.1 million to 33 contractors to serve about 3,000 children.

The federally-funded Respite Care project provided \$200,000 to the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Greater Hartford for the provision of respite services to individuals terminally or chronically ill and children with disabilities and their families. The project operates in Hartford and Tolland counties.

The department contracted with United Way of Connecticut to maintain a computerized database of the state's licensed child care facilities through a project called Child Care InfoLine. Individuals who call a toll-free number are connected with the regional center to learn about child care openings near their home or work place. Facilities in the database provide information about the age groups they serve, their hours of operation, fees they charge, other costs associated with enrolling in their program, available transportation, and other relevant information. During the past state fiscal year, the service averaged 2,800 phone consultations per month.

In partnership with the Department of Higher Education and private nonprofit groups and education communities, the department provided a variety of child care training and provider enrichment activities. These activities helped child care providers: obtain training through tuition reimbursement for early childhood and child care related courses at institutions of higher education and other approved training sites, pay for the cost of

hiring substitutes to provide coverage for employees to attend training programs, pay the costs of seeking national child care accreditation, maintain required health and safety staffing requirements and remain current on child care issues through a statewide child care newsletter, "All Children Considered." Nearly 3,000 care providers received services.

The department provided federal funds to the Department of Public Health to support personnel responsible for licensing child day care centers, group day care homes and family day care homes.

The department also provided funds to several child care organizations for the provision of early childhood enhancement services such as parenting services, expansion of Head Start hours, mental health and health services and services to disabled children. These services helped approximately 1,000 families.

The Healthy Start Program was designed to improve pregnancy outcomes and improve child health. Case management, outreach and Medicaid liaison services are provided by 23 contractors to pregnant women and children. During the reporting period, the program contractors provided case management services to 8,300 children under age 12 and 7,600 pregnant women.

The department's Adult Services Division continued to provide services under the Refugee and Employability Services Program with federally funded social work, case management and employment services to refugees arriving in Connecticut. The goal of this program is to encourage effective refugee resettlement and promote early employment--a major goal of welfare reform--and economic self-sufficiency--another major goal of welfare reform--for people classified as refugees by the federal government. Native and ethnic categories include: Cambodian, Vietnamese, Lao-H'mong, Thai, Ethiopian, Iranian, Rumanian, Russian, Albanian, Malaysian, Haitian, Cuban and Bosnian.

The department awarded 11 grants to Hispanic community-based organizations with the goal of providing young adults and out-of-school youth with language education and employment skills needed for the job market. Counseling and a host of support services are also provided to make the transition to employment as smooth as possible. This program is another example of assistance that is compatible with welfare reform.

The agency currently oversees 14 existing and one proposed continuing care retirement communities to assure compliance with statutory requirements. Statements of financial standing and copies of public disclosure documents are submitted to the agency for review on a regular basis. In addition to monitoring the activity of the industry with regard to operational, financial and contractual matters, the department also responds to inquiries from the public and maintains current files on each community.

The department approved \$3 million in tax credits to Connecticut businesses which pledged \$5,400,000 in donations to 157 programs operated by nonprofit corporations and municipalities under the Neighborhood Assistance Act Program. The programs which benefit from the donations provide a variety of social services, including child day care, education, job training, information and referral, and emergency food, fuel and shelter.

The Neighborhood Facilities Program provides grants from state bond funds for planning, site preparation, construction, renovation, or acquisition of facilities for child care projects, elderly centers, multi-purpose human resource centers, shelter facilities for victims of domestic violence, emergency shelters, related facilities for the homeless, shelters for victims of AIDS and food distribution facilities. During the year, the department obtained state bond commission approval for 52 projects for a total of more than \$22 million.

The department contracted with 14 community action agencies to accept applications and issue benefits under the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program. This program helps those households which are receiving AFDC, Aid to the Aged, Blind or Disabled or Refugee Assistance, and those persons with income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level. The program pays for deliverable fuels such as oil, coal, wood or propane or pays for utility heating benefits. Payments were made directly to the fuel vendor or the utility company, unless the household's heat was included in their rent, in which case they were sent a direct payment.

Nearly 75,600 households received energy assistance and program expenditures, including administrative costs, reached \$34.5 million in combined federal and state funds. An additional \$2.0 million in State Appropriated Fuel Assistance helped 6,792 households with income between 150 and 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines where there was an elderly or disabled member of the household.

In addition, the department administered \$3.5 million in federal and state bond funds for weatherization assistance. Through contracts with the community action agencies, a total of 1,450 households had energy

conservation measures such as heating system repairs or attic and sidewall insulation installed.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program, also known as the surplus commodities program, provides distribution of available USDA food to low income individuals and families. Commodities include butter, canned vegetables, flour, rice and other dry products which are offered by the federal government. The department uses the state's 14 community action agencies to coordinate distribution through a network of more than 300 sites. Food banks also are eligible to receive commodities for distribution to households. Food is also provided to soup kitchens and emergency shelters for on-site meal preparation. In cooperation with the Department of Administrative Services, this department oversees an annual distribution of 1,757,645 pounds of donated food to the public in Connecticut.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program allocated \$389,120 to purchase high-protein food items to be distributed statewide to food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters through a network of some 440 agencies. Approximately 513,546 pounds of purchased food are distributed annually.

In 1994-95, Connecticut received \$4.675 million in federal Community Services Block Grant funds. The law requires that 90 percent of the available funding be granted to community action agencies, five percent goes to the state to administer the funds, and the balance may be used for additional programs that meet the purposes of the grant act at the discretion of the department.

Each action agency has a specified service area and together they serve the entire state, providing services to the low-income population. The funds are used primarily by the agencies to support their core administrative expenses including program development and planning staff, space costs, fiscal staff and audit. These funds enable the agencies to leverage other program grant funds to provide services to assist low-income residents of Connecticut through Manpower, youth employment, Head Start, neighborhood services, day care, summer recreation, crisis intervention, weatherization, emergency food and shelter and coordination and distribution of surplus commodities.

Also in 1994-95, the department received \$35.8 million in federal Social Services Block Grant monies, a reduction of about \$500,000 from the previous fiscal year; the federal allotments to states are based on Department of Commerce census data. A variety of local programs were funded through 115 private nonprofit and municipal service providers. The grants also support programs in seven state agencies in addition to the Department of Social Services.

Services provided include: employment and training, child and adult day care, substance abuse counseling, home care, information and referral, recreation, case management, family planning, legal services, safeguarding and residential services for children. The department identified child day care, case management, home-based services, day treatment, emergency shelter services and safeguarding as high priority and allocated 72 percent of resources to them. Grants were also provided to United Way to fund INFOLINE, the state's comprehensive social service information and referral program. Funded services included information and referral related to child care, Alzheimer's Disease and substance abuse.

The Aid to the Aged, Blind and Disabled Program provides cash assistance to aged, blind or disabled persons whose income is insufficient to meet daily living needs. Recipients include persons with mental retardation or other disabilities who are living in group homes. To qualify, a person must have income from another source such as Supplemental Security Income, Social Security retirement or disability, a pension or wages. A person must also be 65 years old or more, or must meet federal criteria for blindness or disability. Liquid assets cannot exceed \$1,600 for a single person or \$2,400 for a couple. If a recipient owns their home, a lien is placed. A person's eligibility is determined by comparing net income, after certain deductions, to a budget which includes rent and a personal needs allowance. The difference becomes the monthly payment under this program. In 1994-95, an average of 29,097 people received the payment each month; of these, 4,206 lived in group homes.

The Food Stamp Program helps low income households by providing food coupons that can be used like cash to buy food. To qualify, a household income must be below federal poverty limits for a family of that size. For most households, gross income cannot exceed 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Assets must not exceed \$2,000, and for households with two persons, one of whom is 60 year old or older, assets cannot exceed \$3,000. The number of coupons varies according to household income, size and certain expenses, such as

shelter or dependent care. An average of 99,175 households received food stamps during the year. While benefits are 100 percent federally funded, administrative costs are 50 percent federally covered and 50 percent state funded.

Social workers enable people with physical and mental disabilities to remain at home in the community. The staff provide counseling, assessment of medical, social and financial needs and case planning and coordination. Home care services arranged and funded by the department include adult companion, adult day care, choreperson, homemaker, home-delivered meals and emergency response systems. During the fiscal year, about 1,900 people were served by this program.

Personal Care Assistance provides a maximum annual grant of up to \$7,300 to eligible individuals with severe physical disabilities who are either employed or within six months of being employed. Grants are paid directly to the client to employ a personal care attendant to assist with feeding, dressing, housekeeping, bathing and other personal needs; comprehensive social work services are also provided. This program served some 43 persons with grants totaling \$312,420.

The Personal Services Program serves people who have a severe physical disability, require assistance with daily living activities and are unemployed or work less than 17.5 hours per week. Grants are paid directly to the client to employ a personal service attendant to help with personal needs. During 1994-95, this program helped 19 people and cost \$385,000.

The Family Support Grant Program provided grants and social work services to 29 families with children who have disabilities other than mental retardation. These grants helped those Connecticut families defray the extraordinary expenses associated with caring for their children. The expenditure was \$83,700.

Improvements/Achievements 1994-95

Connecticut's welfare reform is a sweeping effort, initiated by the administration with the support of the legislature, to restructure the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program to emphasize work, personal responsibility and self-sufficiency. The principles of welfare reform include: it is better to work than be on welfare; welfare should be temporary-- not a way of life; parents who are able to work should work; individuals are responsible for the support of their families; children are better off seeing their parents working than collecting welfare; and families leaving welfare for work should be supported with child care and medical assistance.

The objectives are: to encourage able-bodied individuals to seek and retain employment by providing time-limited cash assistance focused on employment as an outcome; to assist significantly more individuals to obtain employment by shifting the JOBS Program from a human resource development model to a labor force attachment model; to reduce disincentives for achieving self-sufficiency by limiting additional benefits for additional children born to recipients; to help break the cycle of poverty and provide much needed support to teen parents by requiring them to live with their parents or other relatives; to reduce fraud by requiring adults to cooperate with biometric identification; to reduce inappropriate migration of individuals to the state by paying lower benefits to families during their first year of residency; and to give line staff more time to assist participants in finding employment by simplifying and streamlining programs.

The first set of changes under welfare reform took place on July 1, 1995: AFDC benefits were reduced approximately 6 1/2 percent; the \$50 excess rent special need payment ended; a portion of Section 8 and Rental Assistance Program housing subsidies are counted as income; food stamps increase for some families; and medical benefits are unchanged.

In October 1995 the second set of changes take effect: the redesigned JOBS program will emphasize employment as an immediate goal from the earliest contact with recipients; the short-term goal will be job placement; the long-term goals are increased employment and earnings for participants, leading to reduced dependency on public assistance.

Guiding principles for the JOBS program include: involving the greatest number of people possible; promoting labor market attachment; limiting long-term development services; increasing participants' responsibility for securing employment; procuring low-cost performance-based employment services; and maximizing the use of existing employment-related services within the community.

The third and final set of changes which are scheduled for January 1, 1996, require a waiver of federal regulations: cash benefits are limited to 21 months, but families with unemployable adults are exempted; the Child Care Program is enhanced, and Medicaid eligibility is extended; rules and procedures are simplified and streamlined; the ability to collect child support is enhanced; families in the time-limited program have priority for JOBS services which are designed to help them become and remain employed; income and assets are treated in ways which assist families to become self-sufficient and which reward achievement; families can improve their economic security by keeping all of their earned income, up to the federal poverty level, without a grant reduction; families moving into the state receive a reduced benefit for the first year; at the end of 21 months, families qualifying for god cause may receive a 6-month extension of cash assistance; the benefit increase for additional children born to families receiving AFDC is reduced by 50 percent; some families will be able to use "Opportunity Certificates," which give a tax credit to employers, to help them obtain work; and the need to cooperate with biometric identification is reinforced with a strict penalty for failure to do so.

It is anticipated that savings from the AFDC welfare reform changes will be \$30 million in fiscal year 1995-96 and \$57 million in fiscal year 1996-97.

The General Assistance program provides financial and medical assistance to indigent individuals and families who are pending, or who do not qualify for, other state and federal programs. General Assistance is administered directly by the state's 169 cities and towns, with administrative oversight from the Department of Social Services, which funds 80 percent of municipal program costs. Benefit levels are established by state statute, as is the requirement that employable recipients participate in workfare and other activities that will enhance their employability and promote their re-entry into the labor market.

The General Assistance caseload has dropped significantly in the past two years, from a record high of nearly 36,000 cases in February 1993 to approximately 28,000 cases in March 1995. This decrease is attributed to the continuing effect of significant program reforms enacted in 1992, including case-management planning, mandatory substance abuse treatment and a nine-month durational limit for employable recipients.

Additional welfare reforms enacted in the 1995 legislative session are expected to achieve further program savings. These include reduced benefit levels, a "lifetime" durational limit for employable recipients, restrictions on the eligibility of minors, a biometric identification system to reduce fraud and abuse and an increased earned income disregard to encourage employment.

The 1995 General Assembly also advanced the date the state will assume administration of the General Assistance program, from July 1996 to April 1997, in the 14 cities that currently have department regional and suboffices, and to July 1988 for the remaining 155 towns.

Child Support Enforcement Program collections totaled \$144.2 million: \$55.6 million for those in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and \$88.6 million for families not (NAFDC) in that program. This is an increase of 14.8 percent over the previous year. Other achievements include 7,037 paternity establishments, 23,814 new orders established and 1,450 AFDC cases closed. The percentages of collections made through wage withholding were 52.7 percent AFDC and 48.1 percent NAFDC.

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services awarded two innovative grants to encourage the hiring of persons with disabilities. One grant for \$48,000 to the Department of Administrative Services will modify state hiring practices for job seekers with severe disabilities and is expected to place at least 16 persons in the next year. A grant for \$56,000 to the Connecticut Community Provider's Association will foster employment of persons with disabilities in private non-profit agencies and is expected to place at least 16 persons in the next year. The bureau also received an unprecedented increase in federal grant funding for in-service training to enhance staff skills. The grant for \$74,000 in 1995 is an increase of more than 100 percent over the previous year and provides a structure for decentralized, self-directed training. And, the bureau allocated staff to provide training to counselors in Social Security work incentive programs so that they can assist clients to enter employment while maintaining financial stability.

During 1994-95, the department developed new initiatives for people with disabilities. Two task force efforts resulted in reports to the legislature and passage of legislation. One, coordinated by the Rehabilitation Services Division, studied the feasibility of a medicaid waiver for persons with acquired brain injury. The other, coordinated by the Adult Services Division, examined the development of a medicaid waiver to provide

personal care assistance services for persons with severe disabilities. In both cases, the legislation was passed requiring the development of home and community-based services waivers for programs which will serve nearly 1,000 people.

The White House Conference on Aging was convened by President Clinton in Washington in May to identify needs of the elderly and make recommendations for the next 10 years. This conference was preceded by a state conference in April in Waterbury, as well as many mini conferences throughout the state. The Elderly Services Division is addressing the areas found to be most critical for the elderly in Connecticut.

During the year, elderly services were provided to 25,700 individuals; 1.2 million congregate meals were served to 17,550 older individuals, and 1.5 million home-delivered meals went to 9,490 recipients. Aging network service participants included 21,600 frail or functionally impaired individuals, 13,500 low-income individuals and 5,700 minority group members. These services were paid for by approximately \$2 million from the Connecticut General Fund, \$11 million from the federal Older Americans Act and \$1.6 million in Department of Agriculture commodities and cash reimbursement.

Other programs overseen by the Elderly Services Division include: health screening to 15,500 older persons, adult day care to 1,050 Alzheimer's patients, support for job training to 650 RSVP volunteers and placement to about 300 low-skill older persons. Municipal Agents, trained and supported by the division, answered over 101,000 information requests.

The Elderly Services Division was responsible for implementation of two experimental programs under special federal grants. The Housing Ombudsman Program, operated in conjunction with the North Central Connecticut Area Agency on Aging provides training in conflict resolution and advocacy to volunteer resident advocates in two elderly housing projects operated by the Hartford Housing Authority. The Congregate Housing Services Program, operated in conjunction with the Eastern and Western Connecticut Area Agencies on Aging, and funded by the Farmers Home Administration, provides "circuit riding" service coordinators to six small elderly housing projects in rural sections of the state. Findings from these programs support the value to service coordination in helping residents to "age in place" and reduce reliance on institutionalization to meet the needs of residents whose health is failing.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program recruited, trained, supported and retained highly qualified and motivated volunteers in the state and made them available to nursing home residents and their families. During the year, the ombudsman program facilitated an unprecedented collaborative effort among government agencies and provider organizations to host educational programs on individualized care alternatives to physical and chemical restraints.

CHOICES--Connecticut's Health insurance assistance, Outreach, Information, Counseling and Eligibility Screening provided a highly visible, one-stop shopping point for elders throughout the state. Using a \$140,000 federal grant, a cadre of volunteers provided assistance for over 8,800 issues of concern, an increase of 31 percent over the previous year. In a pilot program, newly designed software at the Area Agencies on Aging in western Connecticut now provides one-stop preliminary screening and subsequent assistance in applying for a number of state and federal benefits and support programs.

There were 26,662 persons enrolled in the Connecticut Medicare Assignment Program (ConnMap) during the reporting period, and 47,025 persons enrolled in the Connecticut Pharmaceutical Assistance Program for the Elderly and Disabled (ConnPace). Also, 96 percent of claims were settled on assignment.

Calls to the department's information and referral unit on behalf of persons age 60 and over totaled 14,761 during the fiscal year. Subjects included: ConnMAP, 1,690; insurance, 1,361; ConnPACE, 1,226; housing, 1,028; protective services, 897; Medicaid, 884; home care, 766; Medicare, 707; general information, 603; reverse mortgages, 548; health care, 511; legal services, 477; employment, 400; financial assistance, 280; adult day care, 255; transportation, 241; long-term care partnership, 216; recreation, 200; tax relief, 190; and fuel assistance, 93.

Reducing Waste

The Child Support Enforcement Program achieved a 28 percent reduction in fee schedule for paternity testing through an RFP process; privatization of child support collections through Shawmut Bank resulted in a

savings of approximately \$0.3 million; and increased worker productivity and prioritization of caseloads reduced the “pending over six days” caseload by more than 44 percent.

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services worked with the Office of Policy and Management, Attorney General and State Comptroller to streamline the process for purchasing routine medical services for clients. As a result, more than 1,000 personal service agreements were eliminated, reducing a labor-intensive administrative burden for the agencies involved.

The Department of Social Services instituted a policy to mail the roughly 60,000 welfare checks to clients once per month, instead of the previous twice. This efficiency move is expected to save the state some \$400,000 per year in printing, mailing and handling costs.

Total cost avoidance and recoveries realized by the Fraud and Recoveries Unit for the year were \$66,919,742, up from \$52,643,574 in the previous year. The cost avoidance and recovery components are: \$33,893, insurance cost avoidance; \$21,925,177, insurance recovery; \$8,047,257, property recovery; \$2,157,108, overpayment recovery; \$897,200, miscellaneous recovery.

The Fraud and Recoveries Unit responsibilities include: maintaining that the Department of Social Services is the payor of last resort for the cost of a client’s medical care by detecting, verifying and utilizing client third-party resources; recovering funds paid to or on behalf of clients by releasing, after receiving the appropriate reimbursement, liens and mortgages, and the selling of quit claim deeds; protecting the integrity of departmental programs by establishing fraud prevention procedures and the investigation and processing of post eligibility overpayments; and reporting of miscellaneous recovery from medicaid overpayments, unclaimed property, and other sources.

The Organizational and Skill Development unit cooperated with 12 other state agencies to collectively purchase training materials, thus saving taxpayer’s money.

The reorganized Long Term Care Ombudsman Program was able to serve as a resource to families and staff alike to resolve problems before they got to the level of regulatory violations, and triggered time-consuming and expensive investigation for the Department of Public Health and Addictive Services.

Internally, the department reassigned staff automobiles to direct-service workers, instituted strict procedures for staff reimbursement, canceled unnecessary telephone credit cards, eliminated underutilized rented office equipment, reduced and combined forms, and streamlined purchasing procedures. As leases for leased property come due, the agency is renegotiating to house separate regional units, such as welfare, rehabilitation and ombudsman, together under one roof. This permits the cost-efficient consolidation of support services.

Strategic Planning

The department serves a broad constituency, including families, elderly and people with disabilities, and the commitment to serve them remains strong as the department pursues its priorities. The department has determined that the following priorities will be the focus for the 1995-1996 year and shall guide resource allocations. Additionally, the department is committed to complying with all federal and state requirements governing the programs it administers.

Implement Welfare Reform -- Implement the administration’s welfare reform initiatives as enacted in legislation by January 1, 1996. This includes working with other agencies, community groups and the business community to maximize the number of employment opportunities for AFDC recipients, as well as ensuring the delivery of child care necessary to support the welfare reform effort.

Implement Child Support Changes - Implement the administration’s child support initiatives as enacted in legislation. This places an emphasis on obtaining child support for AFDC families subject to time-limited penalties.

Implement Managed Care - Implement managed care in the Medicaid program for AFDC and AFDC-related recipients by July 1, 1995, and for the remaining Medicaid recipients by January 1, 1997.

Prevent and Reduce Welfare Fraud - Develop and implement fraud prevention initiatives, strengthen fraud detection, aggressively pursue effective penalties for and efficient recovery of overpayment due to welfare fraud and strengthen eligibility determination to assure payment accuracy and timely recovery of overpayments.

Provide Excellent Customer Service - Improve the courtesy with which we treat internal and external

customers and focus on process improvement measures to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the services that we deliver.

Simplify, Simplify, Simplify - keep the process simple, keep it easy and maximize process improvements.

Affirmative Action

The Department of Social Services Affirmative Action Plan, submitted on March 31, 1995, was approved and granted annual filing status by the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

The department is strongly committed to the principles, policies and practices of affirmative action, equal employment opportunity and contract compliance as required by state and federal laws. The firm commitment to equal opportunity through affirmative action underscores all aspects of the employment process, all programs and all services. Coordination of the department's Americans with Disability Act compliance activities is the responsibility of the Affirmative Action Division.

During the plan year, the department hired 247 full-time employees. Female and minority hires accounted for 71.3 percent and 35.6 percent respectively. Of the total full-time administrators, 45.8 percent are female and 11.8 percent are minority group members.