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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MASTER PLAN TO ELIMINATE THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN CONNECTICUT

Good Morning Doctor Cardona and Members of the Achievement Gap Task Force. I am Roger Senserrich, Policy Coordinator for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide, nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

I am here to express our support for the conclusions and recommendations on the latest report from this Task Force, "For the Children of Connecticut", focused on addressing the achievement gap in the state of Connecticut.

As the report attests, Connecticut ranks very high in the nation on educational achievement, but these results are marred by the very large gap between ethnic and income groups. The achievement in our state is the largest in the nation: Hispanic and African-American students score on average 28 points lower than white students in standardized reading tests, and 35 in math. While our best students in wealthy school districts excel in some of the best school districts in the country, Connecticut's low income students rank among the bottom third of states in 8th grade Math.

CAHS' research mirrors the findings of the task force. In a 2010 report, we found a stark disparity in grade level reading by race and ethnicity. Although 52 per cent of White fourth graders scored at or above proficiency in reading, only 22 per cent of Black and 15 of Hispanic fourth graders did so in 2009ⁱ. These figures are mirrored if we look at grade level reading by geography: 27 per cent of students on urban districts scored at or above proficiency, compared to 48 per cent in suburban and 54 in rural areas.

As it is often the case, these disparities are a reflection of a deeper underlying problem: concentrated poverty. The achievement gap mirrors the opportunity gap faced by many low income and minority kids in Connecticut. In a recent report, CAHS analyzed the impact of race, poverty and education on Family Economic Success. We found that despite being a wealthy state, Connecticut's poverty is concentrated in a few areas, largely in our citiesⁱⁱ.

This geographical distribution of poverty has important consequences for our achievement gap. Recent studiesⁱⁱⁱ have shown that social mobility and opportunity is greatly affected by both income inequality and the level of income segregation. Metropolitan areas where low income families are more dispersed among mixed income neighborhoods have higher levels of social mobility mainly due to increased educational attainment. Connecticut's cities and towns present a very high level of income segregation, worsening our achievement gap.

Closing this gap will be difficult. Our research and program experience have taught us that any solution for educational disparities can not be limited to schools. To address the achievement gap Connecticut needs to broaden its focus. For that, we need to follow the evidence: as the task force report makes clear, to improve educational outcomes we need to achieve clear results in areas like safe and affordable housing, economic stability for families in need and access to quality early care and education. And is in these areas where CAHS will be ready and eager to support the recommendations of the task force.

CAHS' mission is to promote economic success. In our program and policy work, CAHS advocates believes that the best approach to create opportunity for lower income families in the Connecticut is through integrated service delivery. Under an integrated service delivery approach, community organizations, local and state agencies and school districts work together to offer programs and public benefits on a coordinated way. Instead of tackling the issues faced by children and families separately, in isolation, and integrated service delivery model seeks to address these issues holistically, with service providers working together to respond.

By looking outside the walls of the schools to address the achievement gap, the task force report opens the doors for this kind of approach. Our experience with benefits access, financial education and asset building has shown us that building solid bedrock of financial stability for families is a key to creating the stable environments that kids need to thrive in school. Our work in early care and education has taught us that for kid's to be successful their very early experiences are of crucial importance.

We strongly believe that it is time to implement the policies in this report, creating a long term framework to address the achievement gap in the state. It is time to go beyond piecemeal responses, and get to work.

ⁱ Carroll, Judith. (2010). *Closing the Achievement Gap: Early Reading Success and Connecticut's Economic Future*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Association for Human Services.

ⁱⁱ Carroll, J. (2012). *Opportunity in Connecticut: The Impact of Race, Poverty and Education on Family Economic Success*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Association for Human Services.

ⁱⁱⁱ Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, Emmanuel Saez, 2014, "Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States" www.equality-of-opportunity.org