

courant.com/news/politics/hc-ctpovertybill0312.artmar12,0,2251515.story

# Courant.com

## Assistance Program Gets Backing

### Advocates Boost Job Training, Other Aid For State Residents On Food Stamps

By COLIN POITRAS

Courant Staff Writer

March 12, 2008

For the staff at End Hunger Connecticut, it is an all too familiar refrain:

"I want to work, but I can't."

Whether it is child-care demands, a lack of English proficiency or a lack of a high school diploma, people on food stamps often find themselves unable to climb out of poverty without some additional support, said Lucy Nolan, executive director of the Hartford-based advocacy group.

So it was no surprise that Nolan was among the lawmakers, advocates and policy experts who came to the Capitol Tuesday to support a program that could provide critical job training and other assistance to people on food stamps without costing the state a lot of money in return.

The program — laid out in a bill pending before the legislature's human services committee — would allow Connecticut to tap into a pool of federal money offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to states that provide job training assistance to food stamp recipients.

The program offers states a 50/50 match for the state's investment in job training. The matching dollars can then be used to help pay for a variety of services such as transportation to a job training program, child-care assistance, literacy assistance, GED programs, even dental work if it is a proven barrier to employment.

Connecticut is one of 20 states that haven't taken full advantage of the program, officials said. [New York](#) does. To show how lucrative the program can be, advocates pointed out that in 2006 New York received about \$6 million in federal food stamp money. It received \$46.6 million in food stamp employment training matching funds from the Department of Agriculture.

Supporters of the program said Connecticut, which received about \$1 million in federal food stamp assistance in 2006, could stand to gain several million dollars more if the pending bill passes and state officials decide to pursue the untapped funds.



[West Hartford](#) Democratic state Sen. [Jonathan Harris](#), co-chairman of the human services committee and one of the bill's primary proponents, said that with 43 percent of the children in Hartford living in poverty, the state has no time to lose.

"This is the right thing to do, the moral thing to do and also the fiscally responsible thing to do," Harris said. "Poverty is costing the state of Connecticut millions and millions of dollars."

Harris said the best way to attack childhood poverty is to have parents that work. Connecticut, in 2004, set a goal of reducing child poverty by 50 percent by 2014. Advocates hope the job training program will give that effort a much-needed boost.

Myra Smith, a [New Haven](#) mother of two and a food stamp recipient, said the program was needed "yesterday."

"When you are in poverty, it can become permanent if there is no help to help you get to the next level," said Smith, 27. "If I am equipped with the right tools — housing, child care and a job — poverty is not going to come knocking at my door."

State Rep. Toni Walker, D-New Haven, said more job training programs would be especially helpful to newly released prison inmates who often struggle to find work after getting out of jail and wind up committing more crimes and going back to prison at a huge cost to the state.

Contact Colin Poitras at [cpoitras@courant.com](mailto:cpoitras@courant.com).

Copyright © 2008, [The Hartford Courant](#)