



*Written Testimony before the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee
Department of Social Services
January 30, 2025*

Good afternoon, Senator Honig, Representative Foster, and distinguished members of the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee. My name is Andrea Barton Reeves, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services.

I am pleased to submit written testimony today to offer remarks on Senate Bill 1151.

SENATE BILL 1151: AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN FEDERAL VETERANS' BENEFITS AND INCOME ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS FOR CERTAIN PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Senate Bill 1151 will require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to disregard all United States Department of Veterans Affairs-administered, non-service-connected pension benefits, and housebound pension benefits, for purposes of determining eligibility for various DSS programs.

If the Department were to disregard these pension benefits, it would result in increased eligibility, increased caseloads, and an increase in expenditures in each of the programs involved. Additionally, for the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP), this bill would result in lowering the benefits available to eligible households. CEAP is funded through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) block grant, which is a fixed amount. As a result, additional enrollment in the program due to the disregards proposed under this bill would result in the need to lower the overall benefits to live within the fixed dollar amounts.

DSS estimates that the gross cost, both state and federal, for implementing this legislation, would be over \$9 million annually in Medicaid alone. The state share would be over \$5 million annually.

The Department appreciates the intent of this bill. DSS works hard to ensure that eligible Connecticut residents – including veterans – can access our programs. However, the level of funding required to implement this expansion of eligibility is not included in the Governor's recommended budget. As such, DSS cannot support this proposal.