

**Testimony of  
G. Roni Green, Secretary-Treasurer SEIU Local 668**

Before the House Human Services Committee  
March 15, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the impact of the SNAP asset test reimplementation. As a former County Assistance Worker, I know firsthand the important role of SNAP in the lives of Pennsylvania citizens.

SEIU Local 668 represents 20,000 members, who work in state, county and local government, as well as in the private sector. Our members deliver human services to the most vulnerable populations in the state. We have over 4,000 members in the Department of Public Welfare, providing the front line work. I am today joined by one our DPW caseworkers from Berks County Assistance Office, Gene Quaglia, who can provide further detail and comments following my formal testimony.

Secretary Alexander has publically acknowledged that the food stamp asset test won't save any state dollars, but rather is a policy change to improve, what he claims to be, the "program integrity." Integrity implies that equal treatment and fairness will improve, however we do not believe that to be true of this change. Currently CAOs lack sufficient staff and tools to adequately investigate applications. An additional process would further overburden the CAOs, which would result in the added suffering of the people who are truly in need.

According to the information we've received, the number of SNAP recipients who will be impacted by the asset test is roughly 4,000. According to the DPW website, there are about 1.8 million SNAP recipients. That means the number of people impacted by this change is 0.2% of the SNAP population. Welfare caseworkers will be required to gather asset information from every SNAP applicant and recipient despite the fact that the asset test won't have an impact on 99.8% of the SNAP population. Although caseworkers never stopped asking for asset information and never stopped recording the information, there is a difference between recording information that doesn't impact eligibility, and gathering and recording information that will determine if a family will have food to eat.

It is also important to note that additional work couldn't come at a worse time. Because of the ugly turn our economy took, there are more commonwealth citizens in need than ever before that have been dealing with unemployment, foreclosures, hunger and lack of medical coverage. Add this to the 30% decrease in staff the CAO's have seen over the past several years. Additionally, DPW is in the process of rolling out a new software package that is slower than the system currently being used. CAOs already plagued by staffing issues face the possibility of becoming less productive because of computer issues, so the impact of additional work resulting from the reinstatement of the asset test will be magnified.

Rather than looking for ways to save money, the reimplementation of the food stamp asset test will cost the state dollars, because it will take away time from processing other work, including

Medicaid cases. Most of the time and energy in CAOs is devoted to dealing with new applications and keeping open benefits from lapsing. If CAOs fail to close Medicaid cases on time, the commonwealth always loses money and the federal government frequently does as well. If reinstatement of regulations results in only a two or three percent increase in the amount of time spent on food stamps, the cost to the state will likely be millions of dollars. Every extra minute a caseworker spends dealing with asset tests takes away time that could be spent on Medicaid eligibility checks and balances.

Although welfare caseworkers lack the time and the tools to adequately investigate assets, auditors have the luxury of searching for errors. In essence, our leaders are guaranteeing the food stamp error rate will increase, as will the required effort to recoup overpayments and prosecute some cases. Pennsylvania is virtually guaranteed to incur unnecessary costs and lose food stamp accuracy bonus money as a result of this change.

SEIU Local 668 has offered dozens of solutions to improving the integrity of DPW's programs. These solutions would yield real cost savings to the commonwealth. Instead of focusing our time and energy on a problem that doesn't exist and re-implementing a policy that would kick off those in need, we should look at real solutions for the taxpayers of the commonwealth. Some of these solutions include, securing asset information from the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue rather than relying on possibly outdated IRS information. Prevent fraud by arming caseworkers with as much information as possible, such as PENDOT information, which currently isn't available to us. Enforce federal Medicaid child support regulations, which would capture information on parents who have a legal obligation to provide for their own children. Implement a plan to ensure individuals aren't employed or receiving unemployment benefits in a neighboring state. We will gladly provide every representative with the entire list of suggestions we've made that would ensure program integrity for all of the programs County Assistance Offices administer.

Along with the food stamp asset test, Governor Corbett and his administration is proposing egregious cuts to the services the public relies on. The decreased funding to counties is not only going to negatively impact the services at the county level, but also increase the need for services at CAOs, which will continue to overflow the offices. If anyone here thinks closing over 60,000 General Assistance cases will free up time to investigate assets, think again. CAOs will be dealing with people in desperate need of a means to survive. Rather than just making cuts to programs, we need to deliver critical services in the most cost-effective way. That's what our members work hard every day to do, and we are asking that you support us in that endeavor.

We hope our presentation will make each of you think about the real ways we can improve the integrity of DPW programs and save the commonwealth money, while protecting services, rather than implementing the food stamp asset test, which will hurt people in the long run. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss these important issues. We'll be happy to answer any questions.