

# Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5540 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING THE MITIGATION OF BENEFITS CLIFFS.

**Vote Date:** 3/19/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/17/2026

**File No.:** 444

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

## REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to mitigate the loss of temporary family assistance benefits due to certain increases in household income, the so-called cliff phenomenon, whereby a slight rise in income can eliminate eligibility for essential services. Through this bill, the Committee hopes to address the complications constituents face when their income disqualifies them from certain public benefits but does not adequately address their needs.

## RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS), Andrea Barton Reeves, Commissioner:** supports this bill while expressing reservations on specific provisions of the bill, specifically the proposed benefit framework and the elimination of the asset test, due to the associated costs that are not accounted for in the Governor's recommended budget. She highlights how benefits cliffs can cause families significant harm when their increase in income does not compensate for the rapid loss of benefits. This in turn jeopardizes their economic mobility, and thus DSS strongly supports the recommendations put forth in the report produced from Special Act 24-8, An Act Concerning a Benefits Cliff Study (2022). DSS offers their support and collaboration with administrative partners to research solutions to remedy this issue that are feasible within available appropriations.

**Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL), Danté Bartolomeo, Commissioner:** acknowledges and appreciates the intent of the bill but raises concerns regarding the impact that it could have on the Department's Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program. JFES provides job training to those who are recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), with a stated goal of expediting the training and job search processes to allow these individuals to become independent of assistance. He argues that Section 1 would increase caseloads for JFES case managers, thereby creating waitlists and decreasing the quality of case management. The concern he has with the pilot program in Section 3 is the lack of clarity on its implementation and the impacts it could have on the JFES program. He

specifies that he is not opposed to the pilot program but would like to further discuss it with the legislature prior to its passage.

**Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO), Melvette Hill, Executive Director:** supports this bill, stating that the Commission's work with the Two-Generational (2Gen) Initiative revealed the extent to which families struggle due to benefits cliffs, which hinders families in their attempts at financial independence and economic mobility, and therefore disincentivizes them from pursuing higher wages when the impact of lost benefits outweighs pay increases. The gradual reduction in TFA would address this issue for a small portion of residents, and thereby necessitates further research into other programs to minimize benefits cliffs. This drives their support for the pilot program within the bill and demonstrates that it is crucial to properly inform future policy improvements. They reference a study from Northwestern University that revealed how smoothing benefits cliffs strengthens the economy; and she provides several recommendations for the language of the pilot program.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Connecticut General Assembly, Senator Martin Looney, President Pro Tempore of the State Senate, 11th District:** Sen. Looney supports this bill, stating that it would mitigate the loss of temporary assistance benefits when families' incomes increase.

**Connecticut General Assembly, Senator Paul Cicarella, 34th District:** views this bill as a practical approach to the issue of benefits cliffs through the gradual transition off of state assistance. He states that it will bolster workforce participation and help families to successfully transition to self-sufficiency.

**Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA):** The CHA voices support for the bill and connects economic stability to improved public health. They state that the sudden losses of food, housing, and childcare cause stress and instability that harms people's physical and mental health. Thus, they believe that this bill is crucial for supporting workforce participation, mitigating financial strain, and building healthier communities.

Several members of the public, some representing community action organizations, voice support for this bill. They testify, with a few from personal experience, on the hardships that families face when they suddenly lose benefits without the stable income needed to compensate for it. Our system of taxation and benefits, they argue, does not allow for a stable and fair transition to independence. Through this bill, they emphasize that it would ameliorate the fear and instability that currently comes with the impact of an increased income on benefits. Moreover, they note that these provisions are a mechanism to fight poverty and a model to efficiently reform other types of assistance programs in a way that avoids stigma while empowering self-determination.

**CT Citizen Action Group, Liz Diehl, Associate Director:**

**2Gen Initiative, Jacqueline Lorthe, Parent Leader:**

**2Gen Initiative, Veronica Rosario, Parent Leader:**

**CT Legal Services, Kristen Noelle Miller, Managing Attorney of Public Benefits:**

**The Partnership, Amy Peltier, Coalition and Advocacy Director:**

**Kristianna Smith:**

**Liany Arroyo, Director of the Connecticut Urban Opportunity Collaborative (CUOC):** supports this bill and cites her experience working with organizations that help families achieve financial stability. Many families that receive state assistance experience financial emergencies and any sudden drops in support can significantly harm families who do not have the means to offset the costs with their income. Therefore, this bill is an important step to grant families flexibility and stability as they navigate economic independence. Several recommendations are offered to strengthen the bill,

such as 1) the inclusion of community-based organizations to provide benefits navigation, and 2) outreach and the establishment of language accessibility and culturally responsive outreach.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed

**Reported by: Mia Giglietti**

**Date: April 6, 2026**