

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 13, 2007

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State Oversight Team at New Haven Community Action Agency; Statewide Review of Meal Program to Begin

Launching a statewide review of taxpayer-funded meal delivery services, the Connecticut Department of Social Services has sent financial and program monitors to the Community Action Agency of New Haven after being notified that the agency double-billed another non-profit organization for delivering meals to homebound elders and people with disabilities.

Social Services Commissioner Michael P. Starkowski last week assigned a six-person oversight team to review and approve expenditures of state and federal funds by the Community Action Agency of New Haven. In a larger initiative also authorized by Governor M. Jodi Rell, Starkowski directed DSS auditors to conduct a statewide review of meal delivery programs operated by other non-profit service providers.

The state action follows notification to DSS by New Haven community action executive director Amos Smith that he had discovered his agency has been double-billing the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut for meal delivery services to clients of state- and federally-funded programs. The Agency on Aging paid the Community Action Agency of New Haven twice for the same meals from two different funding sources.

No dollar amount was immediately available, but Starkowski said it appears the double-billing has been occurring for some clients for the past several years.

“This news is the latest in a series of problems at CAANH dating back many years and which resulted in DSS requiring a corrective action plan regarding the governance and administration of the agency,” Starkowski wrote in a letter to Smith last week. “It is understood that CAANH is a private, non-profit organization and, as such, has a large degree of autonomy and independence. However, because a huge portion of CAANH’s funding is derived from federal and state appropriations under the auspices of DSS, this agency has a responsibility to require accountability, provide financial

oversight and, if necessary, take whatever action is required to ensure the integrity of these funding streams.”

Starkowski acknowledged in his letter that Mr. Smith is a relatively new executive director who inherited certain problems. “I appreciate your notification to DSS of the double-billing problem,” the Commissioner wrote. “I know that you, as a professional in the field, will understand and support the rationale for this action and the critical importance of its success in resolving the financial and programmatic issues at hand.”

In addition to stationing the quality assurance oversight team at Community Action Agency of New Haven, DSS auditors will visit that agency and the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut to audit and identify the double-billing overpayment amount. The funding sources in question are the state-funded Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders and the mainly federally-funded Elderly Nutrition Program under Title III of the Older Americans Act.

Next, DSS will audit all meals-on-wheels elderly nutrition contractors and sub-contractors to determine if there have been other cases of double-billing for the same meals delivered to low-income clients.

The Elderly Nutrition Program, funded at \$11.2 million to 13 non-profit contractors, serves about 15,400 clients with meals in community settings and about 8,100 clients with home-delivered meals. The Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders serves additional clients with home-delivered meals as part of its role in helping senior citizens avoid institutionalization.

Commissioner Starkowski stressed that DSS has no reason to suspect at this time that other meal delivery programs are tainted by double-billing or other financial irregularities. A statewide review is necessary, however, to ensure that fiscal missteps are not occurring elsewhere, he said.

Members of the new DSS quality assurance oversight team began working at the Community Action Agency of New Haven last week. Starkowski said they will be there indefinitely as part of the overall effort to help the agency rebound from its continuing operational problems.

[Regarding the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services action today to review records at the Community Action Agency of New Haven, DSS has no specific public information tonight.]