



DENISE MERRILL
SECRETARY OF THE STATE
CONNECTICUT



**Nonprofit Human
Services Cabinet**

CT Human Services Nonprofits Join Secretary of the State to Launch Voter Registration Drive

Release Date: May 6, 2014

Contacts:

Av Harris, Press Secretary, Office of the Secretary of the State

Jeffrey Shaw, Project Director, Connecticut Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet

Connecticut's human services nonprofits today joined Secretary of the State Denise Merrill announced a statewide voter registration drive designed to reach more than 500,000 state residents served through programs from childcare to counseling to emergency homeless shelters. The majority of these clients of nonprofits are adult U.S. citizens who have the right to vote, but may be hard to reach through traditional voter registration campaigns. This year — in tandem with similar efforts across the country — Connecticut's nonprofit human service providers associations will assist their member agencies to encourage their clients who are eligible Connecticut residents to register and vote.

"I am very excited to launch this program today to sign up new voters with agencies of the Connecticut Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet," said Secretary Merrill, Connecticut's chief elections official. "We want as many eligible Connecticut voters as possible to exercise their right to cast a ballot in every election, especially those who have historically been forgotten and not included in the electorate." The Office of the Secretary of the State has already begun providing trainings on the newly enacted elections laws such as same-day voter registration and online voter registration.

Nonprofit human service providers have a unique ability to reach underrepresented communities. "Nonprofit providers are well placed to reach eligible voters, to provide them with basic education about their voting rights, and to encourage them to become informed about electoral choices," said Lucy Nolan, Executive Director of End Hunger CT!, and co-chair of the Connecticut Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet. The Cabinet, a project of CT Nonprofits, includes 20 member associations, representing over 800 nonprofit health and human service provider organizations that play a vital role in addressing community needs.

"The great majority of our clients are eligible voters — but many do not routinely exercise that right," said Lisa Tepper Bates, Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, a Cabinet member that represents providers of services to the homeless. "Our provider members can help educate residents they serve about registration and the voting process." Barry Simon, President of Oak Hill, Connecticut's largest nonprofit community provider of services for people with disabilities, also a Cabinet member added, "Encouraging our clients to register and vote is an important part of supporting them to exercise their voice and self-advocate — just as all citizens should do."

Experience in communities across the country shows that nonprofit human services providers' clients and constituents are more likely to respond to nonpartisan appeals to register and vote. John Merz, Co-Executive Director of AIDS Connecticut and co-chair of the CT Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet, added, "We are proud to launch this non-partisan effort to encourage voter registration, with the additional goal of encouraging eligible voters to educate themselves through the media and public candidate debates regarding their electoral choices."

Working together with Secretary of the State's office and with educational materials provided by Nonprofit VOTE, a national non-partisan organization that provides support for efforts like the Connecticut drive, Connecticut Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet associations will offer their provider members educational materials and guidance on voting in Connecticut. "We're pleased to support the Secretary of State and Connecticut human services agencies in their voter engagement and education initiative. Research shows that nonprofits because they are trusted messengers known to their communities are especially effective at encouraging citizenship activities like voting," said George Pillsbury, Founder and Executive Director of Nonprofit VOTE.

####