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Testimony of

Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr.  
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On

Senate Bill 3: An Act Concerning Increased Access  
to Health Care Through the HUSKY Program

Joint Committee on Human Services

March 15, 2007

Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 3: An Act Concerning Increased Access to Health Care Through the HUSKY Program.

I'd also like to commend you for setting aside the day to hear other bills, with similar goals—to increase access to and quality of care; to improve health outcomes; to repair our HUSKY program and turn it into a first-class health care program for those in need.

There are 187 of us legislators here, and with the Governor and Constitutional Officers, that's a lot of people who are here in Hartford to set policy for our state. We come from very diverse backgrounds and we have, as we should, lots of different opinions about issues. Our priorities do not always line up with one another's. But this session, it seems that we all agree that fixing our health care system rises above most—if not all—other issues facing us. And among all the varying health care proposals that are out and about, there is widespread agreement that, as a top priority, we must work to make our Medicaid and HUSKY programs meet their missions.

Senate Bill 3 contains many proposals designed to turn Medicaid and HUSKY into the health care programs they should be. First and foremost, we must face the truth about our public programs, which is that many who have health insurance through Medicaid and HUSKY do not have adequate access to care. As you know too well, according to a recent survey, new patients enrolled in HUSKY or Medicaid were unable to receive appointments for care 74% of the time. That's shocking and unacceptable.

The main problem is that reimbursement for Medicaid has lagged behind all other forms of reimbursement—and far behind cost. As a result, those dentists, doctors, hospitals and other

health care providers who agree to treat Medicaid and HUSKY patients lose money when they do so. And we know that many providers simply do not participate. Senate Bill 3 seeks to remedy this situation by **raising Medicaid rates significantly**. Experts predict that doing so will greatly increase access, by encouraging more providers to participate, and it will provide needed financial stability for those who have been participating all along. Additionally, this solution should end the cost-shifting that occurs when those with insurance pay more to make up for the underpayments in Medicaid and HUSKY.

Senate Bill 3 also contains a number of initiatives designed to reduce the problem of the uninsured in Connecticut. As we know, about twenty percent of the uninsured in the state are actually already eligible for existing programs. Tens of thousands of adults and kids could be—and should be—enrolled in HUSKY, Medicaid or SAGA, but are not, either due to lack of knowledge of the program or barriers to enrollment. We must increase our efforts with proven, cost-effective targeted outreach, and we must remove existing barriers to enrollment and re-enrollment, to get more people the coverage for which they already qualify.

In addition to getting eligible kids and adults enrolled, we also strive to expand access to health care for more adults. Specifically, for parents and relative caregivers of children on HUSKY, we seek to increase the income limits from 150% of the federal poverty level to 185%. Some experts predict that this one change could get over 20,000 more adults insured, with access to the health care they need to stay healthy, so they can work, participate in society and be better parents. Additionally, we know that getting parents insured is one of the best ways to get kids insured.

For adults, we seek to raise income eligibility for State Administered General Assistance (SAGA) and for the medically needy portion of Medicaid. Currently, these income limits are set at 60% of the federal poverty level, which equals about \$6000 per year. Under this proposal, those limits would increase to 100% of federal poverty level. We concurrently would seek a federal waiver to include SAGA under Medicaid, which would maximize the federal revenue coming in to our state.

Also, we would raise the income limit for pregnant women to 300% of the federal poverty level, from 185%. This change would help ensure that women get the prenatal care they need to have safe, healthy pregnancies and deliveries and healthy, robust babies.

Senate Bill 3 is a comprehensive proposal to reform, expand and improve our HUSKY and Medicaid programs. I ask for your support for this critical piece of our health care initiative. Let's work together to help these programs fulfill their promise.

Thank you.