

Community Health Center, Inc.

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Testimony in support of
S.B. 1127, *An Act Concerning The Charter Oak Health Plan And Health Care Access*

Human Service Committee
March 15, 2007

My name is Mark Masselli, President/CEO of Community Health Center Inc. On behalf of CHC, I am pleased to add my voice to the chorus of those who are concerned about the condition of the uninsured in our state and lend my support to the principals outlined in the Governor's proposal to find a Connecticut solution to this national problem-- as it appears that our Federal Government is not willing to lead.

As you know, the Community Health Center Inc. is Connecticut's largest community health center, with a thirty-five year history of providing medical, dental and behavioral health services in primary care centers, schools, and many community-based settings: in short, wherever there are people in need of care. We are one organization, located in 11 communities with delivery sites in over 120 locations across the State of Connecticut. A large number of the 70,000 patients who consider us their Health care home have at one time in their life been without health insurance.

The Governor's bill sets the stage by envisioning a health insurance program for working uninsured adults, from age 19 to 64, of all income levels and it ensures that some critical benefits will be part of any basic Health Plan. In particular it includes a full prescription package, laboratory services and pre- and post-natal care. This bill recognizes that the uninsured come from varying economic backgrounds and it provides for a sliding fee scale based on an individual's gross earnings.

It recognizes that some of the uninsured -- in particular children -- will be eligible for State Coverage through the Medicaid program and lays out a strategy to increase the enrollment in the HUSKY program, with an aggressive targeting in the school systems.

It opens the door to discussions on ways to increase provider participation which, if they are meaningful, could lead to increases in the number of providers who participate in the HUSKY program.

I also want to applaud the Governor's selection of the Department of Social Services to lead this project. The department is leading the way on Electronic interoperability and of course they have shown their leadership in running the

HUSKY managed care program from its inception. There are many practical solutions that the Department knows will work and given the right set of circumstance will ensure the Charter Oak Health Plan will get a good start.

As a long time member in the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce – Connecticut's largest business network and one that draws many of its members from the small business sector. I have learned to listen carefully to what the worries are from my friends who have small business – when the subject of health care comes up, they have two main concerns. First, they have the frustration of not being able to cover a worker because the cost of doing so would put them out of business. But secondly, they have a real concern about the cost of any State-wide plan and how this might negatively impact the business climate in Connecticut.

This poses a unique challenge and as I mentioned earlier this is why we need to find a Connecticut solution to this problem, one that reflects the culture and the values of a very diverse and powerful set of forces within our State. I think the Governor starts the conversation on the right foot – I believe that she understands the initial framework that needs to be in place to get a project like this off the ground. As someone who believes and has spent a lifetime working to ensure that Health Care is a universal right, I have also witnessed too many times when we kill the good in pursuit of the perfect. But I think we have a special opportunity this year, in part because in addition to the Governor's proposal we have serious and thoughtful members of both the Senate and the House who have been thinking about these issues for some time and have developed plans that can add tremendous value to a final Charter Oak Health plan.

Our belief at CHC has always been that: "Health Care is a right, not a privilege"
Let's make this a reality for every citizen of the State of Connecticut

Thank you