

HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 8, 2007

Good morning Sen. Harris, Rep. Villano, and other distinguished members of the Human Services committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you this morning. My name is Dr. Joseph Pavano and I am a practicing Optometrist in New Britain and Bristol. I come before you in support of S.B. 1363, *“An Act Concerning Rates Paid by the Department of Social Services to Vision Care Providers.”*

I have been an eye doctor in New Britain and Bristol for 19 years. As you might imagine, my patient population consists rather largely of patients that live in and around the inner city, and those patients rely heavily on the Medicaid system to pay for their healthcare. It has been my experience that the vast majority of these individuals truly need to be on state assistance, and vastly benefit from my Optometric clinic. I am blessed to have one of the largest eyecare practices in central Connecticut. We serve our patient population with the most up to date technology, including: diagnostic lasers for glaucoma care, retinal lasers for early detection of macular edema in diabetes, digital retinal photography for documentation, computerized visual field, and automated refraction, lensometry, and keratometry. I tell you this not at all to say “look what I have”, but rather on the contrary I tell you this because I want you to know that I have made a considerable investment to properly care for my patients in the inner city. Thus we are fully automated and have an excellent staff and 3 Optometrists. We have created this office to better serve the Medicaid population in the inner city.

I accept assignment for all 4 of the Medicaid managed care insurances, traditional Medicaid, and SAGA. The first 6 weeks that SAGA insurance was reinstated we saw 185 patients in my New Britain practice alone. Forty two percent were cases that were medical in nature. Most of which needed further diagnostic medical testing. I truly believe that these patients deserve the same excellent care that all of you are entitled to. It is my pleasure to see each and every one of them. But... I cannot and should not be expected to do it for 17 cents on the dollar. I'm not sure that you realize it, but Optometrists in the inner city with all of our necessary and expensive equipment, expensive staff, and our ever increasing overhead actually get reimbursed \$35.00 dollars for a comprehensive eye exam and refraction! These are the Medicaid managed care rates reimbursed to me on my last check from the SAGA and Medicaid managed care plans for routine eye exams just last week. Additionally, and as a footnote, 19 years ago when I first started and before Medicaid managed care existed in the Medicaid program, Optometrists were paid \$36.20 for a routine eye exam. So in reality, we were getting paid more back then.

Additionally, it should be noted that the efforts that need to be made by my staff to maintain this commitment to this population is tremendous. We need to constantly try to be as efficient as possible via computers and software. We enjoy doing all this but at times we are overwhelmed. It takes extreme effort and commitment! Dealing with a needy population can create a very stressful environment for staff, doctors, and patients. The level of reimbursement is not at all commensurate to the efforts that we need to make for the many needs of the Medicaid population.

In conclusion, we eye doctors who have made a commitment to serve the inner city population need help. We need to be paid fairly for our excellent service to this sometimes difficult population. We need help in the form of more eye doctors participating in the Medicaid managed care programs. And I ask that you consider this carefully. Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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