

Testimony Before the Public Health Committee

In support of Committee Bill No. 6921

An Act Concerning Behavioral Health

Jeffrey Walter

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My name is Jeffrey Walter and I co-chair the CT Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council with Representative Sayers. The Council is a collaborative body established by the General Assembly in 2005 to advise the Departments of Social Services (DSS) and Children and Families (DCF) on the development and implementation of the Connecticut Behavioral Health Partnership (CT BHP). The agencies have statutory authority to implement an integrated behavioral health services system separate from the Medicaid Managed Care Program for HUSKY Part A children/parents/caregivers, HUSKY Part B children, and children enrolled in the DCF voluntary services program. The Council consists of legislators, consumers, advocates, providers, representatives of managed care plans, and state agencies.

I am speaking on behalf of the Oversight Council in favor of Bill 6921. Sections 1 and 2 relate directly to the Council itself. Section 1 provides compensation to consumer representatives on the Council to offset their expenses for serving on the Council. This is very important to enable consumers to participate fully in Council meetings by providing reimbursement for travel and childcare. The Council is very interested in enhancing consumer involvement because we believe that their input is critical to meeting the program's goals.

Section 2 is a technical change that will align the Council's annual report to the legislature with the state fiscal year.

The Council requests several amendments to the bill: First, we urge the committee to add language requiring annual provider rate increases in the CT BHP that are no less than the average of the annual rate increases granted to managed care organizations in the HUSKY program. Second, we request \$200,000 for the Council to commission an independent evaluation of the BHP, pursuant to section 95(f) of the original authorizing legislation for the Partnership.

Finally, the bill provides for a new pilot program to address the needs of children in CT hospital emergency departments who are not presently receiving timely assessment and treatment of behavioral health care conditions. The Council supports the concept of this proposal and would be happy to work with the Departments to assure that, if enacted, the pilot program works effectively within the BHP framework.

I want to thank the committee for your support of behavioral health needs for children and families and for your consideration of the Oversight Council's requested amendments.

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