TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
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SB 1, An Act Increasing Access To Affordable, Quality Health Care
HB 6332, An Act Increasing Access To Health Care

Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center appreciates the opportunity to testify before the Public Health Committee on the need to improve access to health care for all Connecticut residents. To that end, Saint Francis applauds the focus of these two bills, which are aimed at reducing the number of uninsured in the state by providing access to health insurance for individuals and families that is both affordable and obtainable.

Yet to be successful, any bill aimed at addressing the needs of the nearly 400,000 uninsured in Connecticut must also correct the current shortfall in the State Medicaid and State-Administered General Assistance (SAGA) programs.

In FY2006, Saint Francis lost $28 million providing services to over 6,200 inpatients and 102,000 outpatients who were recipients of Medicaid and SAGA program benefits. Saint Francis also delivered over $9 million in free care to the uninsured in the same fiscal year.

Saint Francis is a vital part of the infrastructure of the Greater Hartford region and provides healthcare to all that seek our help regardless of their ability to pay, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

We have remained true to our mission which states "...We are committed to health and healing through excellence, compassionate care and reverence for the spirituality of each person..." despite the growing losses associated with meeting the needs of the underinsured and uninsured in our community. Regrettably, we are reaching our limit to shoulder this burden going forward.

Saint Francis believes that the State should not create new programs until it is able to adequately fund the programs that are already in existence to serve the poor. In fact, right now the burden of covering the reimbursement shortfalls created by the Medicaid and SAGA programs at Saint Francis is over three times larger than the cost of providing free care to the uninsured.

What Should Be Done

The State must pay hospitals what it costs these institutions to serve individuals enrolled in state sponsored insurance programs just as private insurers and Medicare pay for the cost of the services they purchase from hospitals.

In Connecticut, we are fortunate to have a health care system whose quality is second to none. In fact, the types and breadth of health care services available in Connecticut can be used as a real competitive advantage for the State. However, this quality health care system is in jeopardy because of the drain on resources created by the significant under-funding of the Medicaid and SAGA programs. This quality health system would face even more jeopardy if the state encourages health service utilization to increase without providing sufficient funding to pay for this increasing demand.

Together, we must find ways to ensure that the Medicaid and SAGA insurance programs pay their fair share of the costs of the health care their clients receive. In doing so, the State should also seek to maximize the federal matching dollars available to support Medicaid expenditures. Once we have balanced the equation for Medicaid and SAGA recipients then we can measure the true cost of extending insurance coverage to the uninsured.

Properly funded, providing access to appropriate health care services for all Connecticut citizens is a goal Saint Francis supports fully.

Thank you for your consideration of my remarks.