

CAHS

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Testimony before the Human Services Committee Concerning
S.B. 3 – An Act Concerning Increased Access to Health Care through the HUSKY Program
H.B. 7278 – An Act Concerning Improved Access to Health Insurance
H.B. 7375 – An Act Concerning Health Care Access and Expansion of the HUSKY Program
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Public Policy Director
Connecticut Association for Human Services
March 15, 2007

Good afternoon Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Maggie Adair, and I am the Public Policy Director at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit organization that works to reduce poverty, strengthen families, and reconnect communities through advocacy supported by outreach, research, and public education.

I am submitting testimony on behalf of CAHS and a large coalition advocating for increased eligibility and access to Medicaid, HUSKY, and SAGA. We support elements of the various health care bills before you today that would improve health care to low-income children and adults by addressing accessibility, provider rates, eligibility thresholds, affordability, quality, consumer protections, accountability, and transparency.

Ultimately, CAHS supports a Connecticut health care model that is universal, accessible, portable, affordable, and sustainable. **However, if we do not address the significant barriers faced by low-income citizens as they attempt to access health care, then we will fail to implement a comprehensive health care system that covers all residents.**

The number of health care reform bills emerging this session, including the bills before you today, underscores the recognition that our health care system is broken, inequitable, and adversely impacts citizens from different socio-economic backgrounds. The bills speak out loud and clear that many Connecticut's citizens are not receiving even the most basic health care. These bills, including those before you today, speak loud and clear that our "gold-plate" Medicaid/HUSKY system is fraught with a host of problems that yield far less than is documented on paper.

S.B. 3, H.B. 7278, and H.B. 7375 propose improvements to the Medicaid and HUSKY program; some proposals overlap while others do not. (The Governor's bill, S.B. 1127 proposes some positive elements as well, such as managed care accountability and transparency, HUSKY outreach, and automatic coverage at birth up to two months for the uninsured.) We strongly support the following provisions put forth in the bills:

- raise very low reimbursement rates to Medicaid medical providers to at least 100% of the Medicare rate;
- raise very low dental reimbursement rates to 70% of dentists' fees;

- align HUSKY A parents with their children at 185% of the federal poverty level;
- provide coverage for pregnant women up to 300% of the federal poverty level;
- cover elderly and disabled individuals up to 185% of the federal poverty level;
- cover children under the HUSKY B plan up to 400% of the federal poverty level;
- implement continuous eligibility under the HUSKY Plan for children and adults;
- automatically cover uninsured infants from birth to two months;
- restore HUSKY outreach funding to help families enroll who are eligible but uninsured;
- repeal authorization for the Department of Social Services to seek a waiver that would decrease access to health care;
- require accountability and transparency of HUSKY managed care organizations; and
- institute preventive care programs.

These changes are needed first and foremost as part of a universal health care plan. Health care should be a public right for every Connecticut resident. Given Connecticut's wealth, capacity, and relatively small size, this state should and can provide access to affordable, quality health care for all people. As a state, we should be at the forefront in thinking through and implementing a health care model for the nation to follow.

Connecticut residents are sick of the situation and want change. According to a poll released March 5 by Connecticut Voices for Children and the New England Alliance for Children's Health, *nine in ten* voters (90%) say health care is very important issue for state elected officials to work on, and 82% say elected officials should *do more* to make health care coverage more available.

The challenges are daunting and require creative minds and strong political will. We are relying on the collective intelligence, responsibility, and accountability of each of you, as our elected officials, to figure this out. We urge you to address the expansion of and access to the Medicaid/HUSKY program and to incorporate them into a larger health care reform plan. **In the end, we want health care that is universal in coverage with *real* access to quality health services. Let's be the first in the nation to provide real health care for all.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.