



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION
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Testimony of Cathleen Anderson-Baker
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My name is Cathleen Anderson-Baker. I am the Coordinator of the Keep the Promise Coalition.

Keep the Promise is a statewide coalition of more than forty organizations which was established in 1999 to advocate for the comprehensive community mental health system that the state promised to create when state hospitals were closed. Our efforts focus specifically on implementing the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations for addressing the crisis in Connecticut's mental health services. Despite measures to expand and improve community services and housing, the crisis continues.

Keep the Promise members are deeply troubled that the Governor's budget does not increase the income limit for the Medically Needy coverage under Medicaid. This income limit hasn't been raised since 1990.

Medicaid is a low-income assistance program for the elderly, blind and disabled. Disabled people include many of our citizens with mental health challenges who struggle daily to survive on a very limited income. Medicaid helps many of our citizens. We are grateful. Yet Medicaid unnecessarily adds challenges to the lives of some of our citizens with disabilities.

There are the low-income citizens who have so little income that they automatically qualify for Medicaid. Their benefits are not complicated by spend-downs.

Then there are low-income citizens whose income exceeds the income limit so they have to "spend-down" their excess income every six months in order to benefit from Medicaid. Think about this process. Meeting your "spend-down" requirements means saving all your paperwork from medication purchases; doctor's appointments and other medical treatment. Meeting your spend-down means collecting all of this information at the beginning of each six-month period and presenting this information to DSS in order to use your Medicaid benefit. Meeting your spend-down means contacting DSS on certain days of the week when it is open to the public; waiting on the phone or in-person to explain your situation and then hoping you did everything right. The anxiety of meeting spend-down is similar to getting your taxes done yet twice a year!

Think about the anxiety and confusion a person who is struggling with spend-down has when they are told that they will need to incur hundreds of dollars worth of medical bills before they are eligible for Medicaid services. This anxiety can be disheartening in the least and at worst, can add unnecessarily stress to the person who already is in psychiatric

distress. Is this process helpful? Then imagine that you need to repeat this entire process every six months if you are even a dollar over the income limit.

The income limit for adults on the HUSKY Program is 150% of the federal poverty level. That's more than double the limit for persons who are "aged, blind and disabled".

I hope that you will correct this unfair situation and act favorably on HS 5640.

I also oppose Section 3 of SB 1128 which would eliminate the cost of living increase for State Supplement recipients.