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March 15, 2007

Public Health Committee

Good afternoon, my name is Robert Zavoski, MD, MPH. I serve as President of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and as Medical Director of a community health center here in Hartford. I am here today to offer the support of Connecticut's pediatricians for **Senate Bill 3 and House Bills 7278 and 7377 expanding access to health care through the HUSKY Program, and 7322 to reform the Medicaid managed care system.**

Access to health care for children is an investment in our future. As much as children's universal access to a good public education benefits us all, so too should universal access to quality preventive health care. Yet regrettably, too many of our children and families lack access to adequate and affordable health care. Many are uninsured; many more are under-insured by a HUSKY Program that is failing to meet our state's needs. Too many families delay health care until they are sick, then seek it where and when it is most expensive and least effective. Many have a HUSKY card in their pocket but cannot find a doctor who can afford to see them. Hospitals are closing their clinics as their emergency departments overflow. My health center provides primary care to all who can make it to our door; those who need services beyond what we provide are out of luck. This is not a health system of which Connecticut should be proud; we are prevention wise and procedure foolish.

In previous testimony before this Committee, I presented our Chapter's recommendations that health reform ensure **universal access to comprehensive, affordable, and high quality care**, and that changes of the existing system be **integrated**. We also strongly recommend that to be successful, any Medicaid reform address two critical issues limiting patient's access to care and provider's participation in the program. These are **poor provider reimbursement** in the face of **excessive administrative burdens**.

Senate Bill 3 and House Bills 7278 and 7377 all expand eligibility to HUSKY while ending co-pays and premiums which serve as barriers to care; only 7375 effectively expands patient access by providing health care providers a reasonable rate of reimbursement. Connecticut's pediatricians endorse this bill, but ask that rather than taxing dentists not participating in HUSKY, that instead they, too be paid fairly for their work, so that more will be able to provide services to HUSKY patients.

Connecticut's pediatricians enthusiastically endorse House bill 7322. HUSKY Program reform and oversight are long overdue. So too are effective efforts to seek out viable alternatives to our current system of managed care. Even the Lewin Report, produced at the behest of the four Medicaid managed care plans, concludes that for the system to survive, that both provider reimbursement must be increased and other alternative models would better serve the state's interests. Where the Academy of Pediatrics differs with the Medicaid MCOs is that we doubt their recommendation for a capitated managed care system would work in Medicaid; many of their usual and customary mechanisms to "disincentivize" patients from over utilizing expensive services cannot be legally used with Medicaid patients forcing them to shift the risk burden entirely on the providers. For this, as well as other reasons, the AAP endorses piloting a system of Primary Care Case Management in Connecticut, modeling this pilot on successful programs in other states. We do offer one caution with the bill under consideration; in Section 9, we are hesitant to endorse a leap into PCCM until there are enough primary care providers willing and able to participate. Without aid, our current safety net of community health centers and school-based and other clinics are incapable to handling an influx of many more patients. To be successful, HUSKY needs to bring more willing and able private practitioners into the program.

Connecticut's pediatricians pledge to work with the General Assembly to make the dream of access to care a reality for as many of our fellow residents as possible. Thank you for your attention.