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HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
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Senator Harris, Representative Villano, members of the committee, I am Dr. Jerry Hardison, practicing optometrist here in Hartford. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Raised Bill #1363.

Early last month I testified on the prior version of this bill that addressed only rates paid to providers of eye care under the SAGA program. I am pleased that the committee has shown interest in expanding this to all Medicaid programs. Medicaid managed care plans as well as the SAGA program reimburses providers at rates far below the standard Medicaid fee schedule. Dr. Pavano, who follows me, will comment more on this impact.

Those private health care offices located in urban centers that accept Medicaid are often inundated with requests for care. It is at times an overwhelming challenge to balance the poor reimbursement from Medicaid plans with the ever increasing costs of overhead, qualified staff, new diagnostic technologies and the need to provide a comfortable working and patient environment. At the very least reimbursement levels for any service under the various Medicaid programs and SAGA should never be below the rate paid to providers under the Medicaid fee-for-service program.

Additionally, Bill 1363 eliminates restrictions on direct access to licensed providers of eye and vision care. As is recognized more and more by commercial carriers, a gatekeeper requirement for medical eye care is not a very efficient and accessible system. I have experienced numerous occasions when the necessity for prior approval or referral has wasted staff time, inconvenienced patients and resulted in the inability to provide care when needed.

Health care providers who work in urban centers face many challenges in caring for the Medicaid population, a population that often has greater health care needs than the general population. If these needs are to be addressed and access to care improved, providers must be assured that they will be adequately reimbursed and given the flexibility to manage care. Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

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