

State of Connecticut

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Labor and Public Employees Committee
Submitted By State Comptroller Nancy Wyman
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Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on a bill currently under deliberation before your Committee.

I would quickly like to provide general comment to the Committee on House Bill 6333, "An Act Expanding the State Employee Health Insurance Plan." House Bill 6333 proposes to allow self-employed and uninsured individuals access to the state employee health plan and directs my office to negotiate low costs for those individuals. As many of you know I have been working over the last decade to bring accessible and affordable health care to all state residents. I have several proposals pending before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee that would make the Municipal Employees Health Insurance Plan more accessible to small businesses. Currently, self-employed individuals can participate in the MEHIP. In addition, I am currently working on a plan to provide health insurance to all municipal and board of education employees in the State and believe that this is an important first step to a larger state-wide pool that can be accessible to everyone.

I do want to point out a couple of issues for you to consider as you move forward with this legislation. First, Section 5-259(j) requires that the current collectively bargained plan for state employees cannot be impaired by changes to Section 5-259. It also requires that entry into the state employee plan requires a recommendation to the Comptroller from the State Employee Bargaining Coalition.

Second, the current plan for state employees and retirees was negotiated by the Rowland administration and is part of a twenty year agreement that locks in the current benefit structure until 2017. This raises two concerns. One, the current benefit structure of the state employee plan, despite the great job my staff has done in keeping the cost increases to a minimum, may be unaffordable to self employed individuals and individuals who currently lack health insurance. Two, negotiations with the State Employee Bargaining Coalition would need to occur in order to enable me to offer a benefit plan within the state employee plan that has a benefit structure that departs from the current benefit structure offered.

I would be happy to sit down with the Committee and with the sponsors of this legislation to work on a solution that will provide greater access to health insurance for self-employed and uninsured individuals.