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HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE HEARING SUPPORT HB 5618 and HB 5617

Good morning. My name is Marcia Bok and I am testifying this morning for the National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter on two items of importance regarding health care.

While we all acknowledge how complex health care is, we are all committed to improving quality, access, and affordability of health care for all the people in our State. But in the process of trying to improve health care for all, it appears that we are taking it apart and putting it back together again in so many different ways that we may not be improving the situation at all. There is concern that while we intend to increase the number of people who have health insurance, we may be actually reducing coverage in the process.

I want to support HB 5618 which would provide continuous eligibility for HUSKY. We can definitely simplify the procedure for establishing continuous eligibility so that children and parents do not lose their coverage. Since last July, 10,000 people are missing from HUSKY A. Without continuous coverage, children have gaps in coverage as they move from HUSKY A to HUSKY B and vice versa. Such churning not only creates gaps in coverage but increases paperwork for program administrators and for providers.

We want eligible children and adults to receive HUSKY A and B. We don't want to put obstacles in the way of receiving needed coverage. We need to provide information and outreach and simplify eligibility procedures and we must focus on retention and enrollment, given the complexity of the program. We should simplify proof of income, make children eligible for HUSKY for at least one year, eliminate premiums and co-pays for HUSKY A adults, keep working families on HUSKY for up to 24 months and provide outreach to help families apply for and keep HUSKY coverage. I think we all agree that HUSKY is a vital program for children and families. I think we would also all agree that we want to encourage and not discourage utilization of the program for eligible individuals and families. Thank you very much for your attention.

HB5617 Delaying and revising the Charter Oak Plan is a tremendous improvement to the law that was passed during the 2007 legislative session. For NASW/CT there are two improvements that are key: 1. Including comprehensive mental health coverage (as well as dental and vision coverage) and 2. Establishing an external appeals process for consumers. At the Informational Forum that was held this past fall on the Governor's Charter Oak Plan, it was very clear how few people would have actually

benefited from this plan. Clearly, legislators listened and have worked very hard to improve the Plan and make it a health insurance plan that would make it affordable and comprehensive.

We urge the Human Services Committee to support HB5617 and HB 5618.
Thank you for your time.