

Testimony of Susan Lloyd Yolen, Vice President, Public Affairs & Communication,  
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Bill Number 34, An Act Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations With  
Respect to Social Services Programs.

February 26, 2008

Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to add the voice of Planned Parenthood of Connecticut to those urging you to refrain from eliminating foreign language interpreter services provided beneficiaries with limited English proficiency as a covered service under the Medicaid program. Planned Parenthood is the largest provider of reproductive health in Connecticut, serving nearly 65,000 patients annually at 18 health centers statewide.

As a Medicaid provider whose patient population has become increasingly diverse, Planned Parenthood is one of many attempting to offer culturally and linguistically appropriate care to our patients who speak little or no English. For years we have relied on bilingual staff in several of our busiest, most diverse centers, (Bridgeport, Meriden, Waterbury, Hartford, New London) to shoulder the burden of their usual job duties in addition to offering translation between caregiver and patient during the visit. At about 5200 patient visits to PPC each year, medical interpretation is necessary or desirable.

Like other institutions facing this challenge, we have come to realize that there is a considerable difference between "translation" and medical interpretation. The latter more carefully attends to the patient's needs, the precision of medical terminology, informed consent and clarifying all other aspects of the examination or procedure to the patient.

Planned Parenthood has recently offered our bilingual staff members who qualify, an opportunity to become certified as medical interpreters. With this skill, these staff members are now more valuable to our organization, and have additional value on the job market as well. We are happy to be able to offer our employees this route to professional improvement, while we better meet patient needs.

Making these services and training available helps us meet our mission, and we are proud to be able to offer linguistically appropriate care to women in need of reproductive health care. In practice, the isolation a woman who does not speak English may feel, coupled with possible cultural hesitation to discuss sexual and reproductive health matters, can result in delayed care that is costlier and more complex. Medical interpretation services have become every bit as necessary as other aspects of the care we offer, which is why we join others in asking that the Medicaid program reimburse providers for foreign language interpretation as a covered service. Please restore the language providing for this reimbursement in the Governor's social services budget. Thank you.