

# CAHS

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**Testimony Before the Human Services Committee in Support of  
S.B. 562 – An Act Concerning Increased Access to the Medicaid Program  
for the Medically Needy Elderly and Disabled  
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Policy Director  
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March 4, 2008**

Good morning Senate Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Maggie Adair, and I am the Public Policy Director at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and engage, empower, and equip all families in Connecticut to achieve financial security.

CAHS supports **Senate Bill 562, An Act Concerning Increased Access to the Medicaid Program for the Medically Needy Elderly and Disabled**. This bill would create equity in the Medicaid program for people with severe physical and mental disabilities and elderly citizens. The bill would align the income eligibility threshold of elderly, blind, disabled people with those of parents and caregivers of HUSKY children at 185% of the federal poverty level. **There is no justification to allow for different income standards for different groups of people. We all get sick. We all need access to health care. This bill is long overdue.**

When I first learned about the inequitable treatment to elderly and disabled citizens, I found it hard to believe. In Connecticut, low-income elders and people with physical and mental disabilities *must be far poorer* than other eligible groups to qualify for Medicaid. Last session, the Legislature raised the income level to 185% of the federal poverty for adults to qualify for HUSKY A – in alignment with children. We applaud this policy change. **But *nothing changed* for our most vulnerable citizens whose income eligibility threshold stands at a miserly 60-70% of the federal poverty level, a level that dates back to 1990!** Given our knowledge that the Federal Poverty Level is an obsolete tool to measure poverty, people at 60-70% of the Federal Poverty Level are *poorer than poor* in 2008.

Efforts were mounted last session to correct this inequitable situation, and legislative support substantially grew, but in the end, this needed reform was not part of the budget package. **The Legislature has a chance to get it right this session and ensure that our elderly and disabled citizens are provided access to the medical care they so desperately need.**

Raising the income threshold would help many elderly and disabled people get off the “spend-down” program so they can qualify for Medicaid coverage. This program requires “aged, blind, and disabled” individuals to incur enough medical expenses within a six-month period to “spend-down” to qualify for Medicaid. They must pay out-of-pocket costs for medical expenses – within a six-month period – to spend down to the income limit of 60-70% of the federal poverty level. When very poor people – with

limited or no ability to work and increase their assets – have to pay for costly medical services to meet this spend-down, it would not be surprising that they put off important health care, their health gets worse, they experience further financial hardship, and end up needing more costly and more intensive services. I cannot imagine that people at this range of income can possibly afford these medical expenses along with the rising cost of rent, heat, gas, and food. It's time we moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and took a realistic look at what income it takes for a person to be barely self-sufficient.

**There is no question that this will cost money.** The Office of Fiscal Analysis estimates that it would cost \$215 million to increase the threshold to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level. But lots of things cost money in Connecticut and yet we are willing to cover the costs if we really care about them. We pay for many things that are good and important for this state such as health care, education, transportation, public safety, arts and culture, economic development, pension obligations, etc. We are even willing to lose revenue from plenty of tax credits given to constituencies at various income levels. It's time that our elderly, blind and disabled are considered at least as, or much more, important. They are, after all, our citizens live in and contribute to our communities and the state as a whole.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.