



Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.
Testimony before Human Services Committee
March 4, 2008
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**S.B. 562: An Act Concerning increased access to the Medicaid program for the Medically Needy
Elderly and Disabled Support**

I am an attorney at Greater Hartford Legal Aid. I have represented low income Hartford area residents primarily in public benefits cases for many years. I am here to speak in support of increasing the income limit for Medicaid for the disabled.

In order to qualify for Medicaid, you have to have to first fit within a certain category for which there is coverage, and then your income has to be below a certain amount. The income limit varies depending on the coverage group

Unfortunately, people who qualify for Medicaid on the basis of being aged or disabled, have an income limit of \$683, a mere 78% of the poverty level (That is the income level in the Hartford region and eastern Connecticut. It is slightly higher in western Connecticut.) Someone with income higher than \$683 per month can only qualify for Medicaid on the basis of a spend-down. The way a spend-down works is that DSS calculates over a six month period, how much income a person has in excess of \$683 per month. Once that excess is all spent on medical expenses, the person qualifies for medical coverage for the remainder of the six month period. From reports I have seen from DSS, only about 10% of those in the spend-down coverage group actually meet the spend-down and qualify for medical coverage.

One group that is especially harshly affected by this limit is Social Security recipients-- both those who qualify on the basis of age and those who qualify on the basis of disability. The irony is that the present rule penalizes those with a work history. Someone with a disability who has an insufficient work history can qualify for SSI, which now pays \$637 per month. Medicaid eligibility will be automatic for this person. But some one with the same disability who happens to have worked enough to receive \$50 more per month, \$687, in Social Security disability benefits, will not qualify for Medicaid in Connecticut without a spend-down. Basically medical expenses have to impoverish someone to within \$50 of the SSI level to qualify for medical coverage.

Just last week I had a client who receives Social Security of about \$700 per month, who fell behind in his rent because he has been paying out of pocket for needed medication, and is now facing eviction. It is not clear yet whether he will save his housing. This situation recurs with predictable frequency among clients in our office.

I commend the General Assembly for increasing the HUSKY limits for children and their parents to 185% of poverty. But the medically needy disabled should not be left behind. This is a group that needs medical coverage. The rules should have an income limit that more realistically reflects living expenses. Someone who can no longer work should not have to use so much of their money for medical expenses that they cannot afford the most basic necessities.

