



N A S W

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HUMAN SERVICES PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 4, 2008
Testimony on SB562 and SB564

Good morning Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Hillary Russell and I am the Political Director for the National Association of Social Workers/Connecticut Chapter. I am testifying today **in support of SB562 An Act Concerning Access to the Medicaid Program for the Medically Needy Elderly and Disabled**. As you can imagine many of our members work with clients who fall within this very vulnerable group of people. First and foremost, it is not clear why this group of people must be more impoverished than other eligible groups to qualify for Medicaid. The income eligibility for Medicaid for this population has not been increased since 1990. As you know, right now we only provide Medicaid coverage for people who are elderly and disabled with incomes up to 60-70% of the federal poverty level. It is hard to imagine anyone living on \$492 a month, let alone having to pay for medical care out of this income. Clearly, this group of people often have difficulty understanding what is involved in the spend-down process and keeping track of their medical expenses (not including prescription drugs – as these are now covered by Medicare Part D). Trying to understand the spend-down process, meeting with the DSS worker and doing all of this in a timely manner twice a year seems like a lot to ask of this vulnerable population. **The two key points are: fairness and equity. Connecticut needs to provide access to critical health care services for this population of people.**

In addition, **NASW/CT supports SB564 An Act Concerning Services for Persons with Mental Health Needs**. It is clear that in order to provide the necessary mental health services in the State we need to ensure that provider reimbursement rates are reasonable. This directly impacts individuals access to mental health care. As members of the legislature heard many times last year and during previous sessions providers ability to offer care is directly impacted by their reimbursement rates. In order to assure access to quality mental health care and offer clients choices regarding providers the reimbursement rates for providers have to be reasonable. We hear from our members who either work in private practice or in a mental health facility of the low rates and low wages for mental health practitioners. Social Workers provide 60% of therapy in this country and state. We urge you to pass this bill which will increase the likelihood that access to quality mental health services will improve, hence the well being of clients will be directly impacted. Thank you for your time.