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STATE OF CONNECTICUT
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
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State of Connecticut

Testimony Opposing R.B. No. 5617:
An Act Delaying Implementation of and Making Revisions to the Charter Oak Health Plan

Thank you, Senator Harris, Representative Villano and other distinguished members of the Human Services Committee for this opportunity to provide you with testimony against Raised Bill No. 5617, **An Act Delaying Implementation of and Making Revisions to the Charter Oak Health Plan.**

In 2007, we participated in one of the genuine success stories of the General Assembly session.

- We took action to approve the Charter Oak Health Plan and, for the first time, bring affordable health coverage to Connecticut's uninsured adults.
- We took action on behalf of our uninsured constituents, who have been struggling to find health insurance they can afford.
- We took action to safeguard our uninsured constituents' health, financial security and peace of mind.
- And we took action to place Connecticut once again as a national leader in the health care field, to show that our state could forge a practical, successful approach to a problem that has defied a national solution.

The legislation to create Charter Oak set a start date of July 1, 2008. My administration has been working long and hard to put the pieces in place to meet this implementation date. July 1 is less than five months away – a very short time for government, but a very long time if you are facing medical expenses without the protection of health coverage.

Now, with Raised Bill No. 5617, you are in danger of undoing the progress you voted to begin last year.

While those in government write bills like No. 5617 at the State Capitol, people in our communities have to read bills from their doctor and hospital -- and far too often they cannot afford to write the checks to cover those bills.

While some in government talk about delay, the people we are here to serve talk at the kitchen table about how to speed up the Charter Oak program because need they need the health care coverage now.

While legislative action in 2007 raised the hopes of our uninsured adults, Raised Bill No. 5617 has the potential to dash those same hopes.

Raised Bill No. 5617 calls for delaying implementation of Charter Oak until July 2009. That is only part of the problem in this flawed and misguided proposal -- because Raised Bill No. 5617 mandates program changes that would effectively kill Charter Oak before it has a chance to begin, no matter the year.

The bill would strip Charter Oak of its defining factor -- affordability. It would do this by raising benefit levels and cutting out-of-pocket costs to the point that overall costs to both consumers and taxpayers would be unreasonable and prohibitive. Uninsured adults could forget about an affordable monthly premium. Taxpayers could forget about an affordable helping hand to the uninsured.

In fact, the provisions of Raised Bill No. 5617 are oxymoronic. You can't legislate a monthly maximum premium of \$250 if you also legislate a super-rich benefits package and virtually non-existent co-payments. Connecticut needs you to fight for the uninsured, not to delay and dither while another year -- or two -- goes by.

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But no one has to take my word for the negative impact of delaying Charter Oak while destroying its affordability. Let me quote two excerpts from the many messages I received yesterday from Connecticut residents (copies of emails sent to legislators who will vote on Raised Bill No.5617.)

1. **"...The negative health and financial implications that any delay would have on so many of your constituents is so great, that this should NOT even be a consideration...**To do anything other than push forward with the implementation of Charter Oak Health Plan for the already established July 1 2008 start date, regardless of the difficulties, would be a serious breach of your duties and responsibilities. A delay in the implementation would certainly result in tremendous financial hardship for some and suffering or death from lack of early care (or care at all) for others.

“Furthermore, I think that if you do foolishly choose to vote for any delay in implementation of the Charter Oak Health Plan, you should likewise choose to cancel your own personal and family health insurance coverage! This will allow you to suffer in solidarity a similar fate with the tens of thousands of Connecticut residents which you are choosing to delay coverage for.

“Yes, I am suggesting that you walk a mile in the shoes of those without a safety net, those whose illness will result in financial ruin, and those most likely to suffer and die for lack of proper medical care! Yes, it will indeed be a very enlightening experience for you to feel the pain of the disenfranchised...I thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I again implore you to vote for the July 1, 2008 start up date for the Charter Oak Health Care Plan.”

2. **“I am a Connecticut resident who just spent over \$350 this month alone on my necessary medications, because I have a business, and can't get health insurance.** I must pay cash for doctor's visits, and this keeps me from staying current on bills. I contacted DSS about the Charter Oak Health Plan over a year ago, and have been waiting for it. This program cannot be postponed another year!!

“Many other adults like myself work hard, and yet struggle just to afford health care. Sometimes adults go without necessary treatment because they don't have the money. There is a higher death rate among the uninsured. This is simply inhumane. Therefore I insist you defeat Bill 5617, and get the Charter Oak Plan up and running by July 1st!!”

To provide further citizen input, following are several comments from Connecticut residents in 2007. They represent many others who have called and written to my administration. They are still waiting. Any proposal to delay Charter Oak to 2009 would be incomprehensible and unacceptable.

- **“Your proposed maximum monthly premium of \$250, with no maximum income limit, would be wonderful, and I would gladly sign on to that...**I would be pleased to pay more than \$250 per month, even twice that amount if necessary, to make this plan happen...I understand there are significant co-pay and deductibles, but I have them now, anyway...If you need to negotiate a more flexible premium schedule for different income levels I encourage you to do so – anything to get this plan in place, as soon as possible!”
- **“It is so anxiety-producing to have to take \$1,242 out of my savings every month...**I know the Governor's plan is coming in the fall, but by then all my savings will be depleted and I will have to start on my retirement funds...Still, I am very grateful for your attention and the Governor's plan. I just wish it would come sooner.”
- **“I have just received a notice from a friend concerning Charter Oak Health Plan.** This sounds as if this would be very important to me. I am currently receiving Cobra benefits that will end late this year. I am 58 years old and finding new employment with benefits is not easy.”

- **“This plan would be life saver to my parents and I'm sure to countless others in similar circumstances.** Please let me know when we can hope for this plan to be implemented...I would like to say that I am so thrilled that this problem is being addressed and this proposal sounds absolutely wonderful.”
- **“My dad only takes home \$191 a week** and it is him and my mother. I do not know how my parents survive and they need the health insurance.”

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Ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing wrong with talking and considering how Charter Oak might be reasonably improved. In fact, my administration has been open to that option. Last year, I added a premium assistance component. The Department of Social Services recently increased the pharmacy and durable medical equipment benefits and reduced the annual deductible. We are willing to consider further changes as resources permit – ***but not at the risk of delaying implementation of this critical health program.*** We need to get Charter Oak up and running.

As legislated in 2007 and as designed, Charter Oak is a practical, realistic approach to bringing affordable health coverage to our uninsured adults.

Charter Oak, as already legislated, is what Connecticut needs now to help the uninsured. I respectfully ask you to vote no on Raised Bill No. 5617. Thank you.