CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Monday, March 3, 2008

SB 458, An Act Concerning Linguistic Access In Hospitals And Diversity In The Health Care Workforce

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 458, An Act Concerning Linguistic Access In Hospitals And Diversity In The Health Care Workforce.**

SB 458 would increase state oversight on hospitals for an existing set of requirements for the provision of interpreter services to non-English-speaking patients. CHA supports the goal of providing interpreter services to, and improving linguistic access for, non-English-speaking patients. Unfortunately, SB 458 does not improve the current system. More oversight would add an unnecessary, administrative layer that would result in expenditure of costly resources without improving the situation. The state could improve services for non-English speaking patients by directing more resources to developing a program increasing the number of qualified medical interpreters.

Hospitals already provide interpreter services for their many non-English-speaking patients. However, as the demand for interpreters rises, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a sufficient number of qualified medical interpreters who can provide these services. Governor Rell's FY09 budget eliminates the $4.7 million in appropriations for medical interpreters under Medicaid and eliminates the requirement to amend the state Medicaid plan to include foreign language interpretation services in the healthcare setting as a covered service. Healthcare disparities can arise when patients encounter barriers to communication. Hospitals provide interpreter services for their Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients, but generally are not reimbursed for the costs of these services. Allowing interpreter services to be reimbursed under the Medicaid program is a small, but meaningful step in assisting hospitals that are already using resources to provide this vital service to their LEP patient population. Each year, the need for LEP services increases significantly, further challenging our healthcare system. Last year, the General Assembly enacted, and the Governor signed, legislation that recognized this critical need and allowed medical interpreters to be reimbursed under the Medicaid program.

CHA urges the General Assembly to restore the funding for medical interpreters under the Medicaid program, thereby increasing the number of such interpreters and reducing barriers to access, prior to increasing the regulatory oversight of hospitals.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.

110 Barnes Road • P.O. Box 90 • Wallingford, CT 06492-0090 • Phone: 203.265.7611 • Fax: 203.284.9318 • www.cthosp.org