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Testimony to the Human Services Committee
An Act Delaying Implementation of and Making Revisions to the Charter Oak Health
Plan
Bill # HB5617

The CT Women's Consortium (CWC) is a statewide policy, advocacy and training agency that focuses on the behavioral health needs of women. CWC is urging your support of HB 5617.

CT's current mental health parity law, which is a national model, mandates that a health plan that offers coverage for medical and surgical conditions must offer coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of mental or nervous conditions. Coverage for mental health services cannot be at a greater expense than the medical and surgical coverage. [*Sec. 38a-514(b)*] Unfortunately, if the Charter Oak Plan is approved as is, it will be in violation of our state's mental health parity law.

Living with a behavioral health issue is challenging at best. Stigma continues to exist and is reinforced for many by the lack of needed services in a timely and efficient manner. The Charter Oak Plan offers an opportunity to recognize this access problem and, by applying CT's mental health parity law, can offer meaningful coverage to those who would be eligible for the Charter Oak Plan and in need of behavioral health services.

The rationale that coverage for mental health services would be too expensive to include in the Charter Oak plan is short sighted. Lack of coverage results in expenses that occur when those in need have limited or no options for obtaining care. Within the health care delivery system, there is an increase in ED visits and inpatient hospitalizations and those expenses – both fiscal and emotional - spill over to other systems, such as the criminal justice and child welfare.

I would encourage you to continue to keep CT's commitment to its citizens with behavioral health needs by ensuring that our state's mental health parity law is reflected in the Charter Oak Plan.

If you have any questions or would like additional information from the CT Women's Consortium, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you.