

Human Services Committee Public Hearing 2/26/08
Katharine Bobel

SB 34 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations with Respect to Social Services Programs.

Good Afternoon Members of the Human Services Committee.

My name is Katharine Bobel and I am a student from the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work Masters Program interning at the Hispanic Health Council's Latino Policy Institute. I am here in response to the Governor's \$4.7 million cut for medical interpretation for individuals in Connecticut who have limited English proficiency and who are insured through Medicaid.

Imagine being in the emergency room with acute pain and having a nurse ask you questions to determine your symptoms, but you cannot understand her because you speak another language. Although you have lived in this country for a number of years, the medical jargon is difficult for you to decipher, especially under these stressful circumstances. Imagine a doctor calling out to see if someone in the emergency room speaks your language. Imagine if your life depended on a random stranger or your own child interpreting your symptoms so the doctor can come up with an accurate diagnosis.

Sadly, this is a true scenario that happens daily in health care settings across the state. In Connecticut there are an estimated 22,000 Medicaid recipients that have limited English proficiency, and there are 65 different languages being spoken by low-income residents with limited English proficiency.

When these individuals have to rely on non-professional interpreters such as family members, friends or untrained staff members this can result in misdiagnosed or undiagnosed medical conditions, delayed or inappropriate care, medical mistakes, and higher costs for the entire system, as well as compromised quality of care with regard to confidentiality and dignified provision of services.

Last year the Connecticut General Assembly heard the pleas of hundreds of Connecticut residents and passed the critical law providing funding for these services. But now, the Governor has removed the money from this year's budget.

I am here today to ask the Connecticut Legislature to restore the funding for medical interpretation and require that medical interpretation be added to the State Medicaid Plan. Having face-to-face, professionally trained medical interpreters in the healthcare setting results in cost-saving measures by avoiding having to pay more money later because a patient has had a medical condition misdiagnosed or undiagnosed due to his or her limited English proficiency. It also saves valuable time and promotes efficiency during the clinical encounter, which is priceless given our over-burdened health care system.

Under civil rights law, the denial or delay of medical care for limited English proficiency patients due to language barriers constitutes a form of discrimination. Understanding and receiving accurate information is not a luxury for a patient in a healthcare setting – it is a necessity, a civil and human rights issue, and ultimately good public policy.

Once again I urge you to reject the elimination of these funds.

Thank you for your time.

If you have any further questions feel free to contact me.

Katharine Bobel
University of Connecticut School of Social Work Intern
88 Brittany Farms Rd Apt. J 313
New Britain, CT 06053
(860) 612-1762
(203) 770-3824
Kat677@aol.com