



National Multiple Sclerosis Society
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The Human Services Committee Public Hearing March 4, 2008

Testimony in support of

- **S. B. No. 561 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE MONEY FOLLOWS THE PERSON PROJECT AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A LONG-TERM CARE TRUST FUND.**
- **S. B. No. 562 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING INCREASED ACCESS TO THE MEDICAID PROGRAM FOR THE MEDICALLY NEEDY ELDERLY AND DISABLED.**
- **S. B. No. 567 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT HOME-CARE PROGRAM FOR THE ELDERLY.**
- **H. B. No. 5791 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY FOR LONG-TERM CARE.**
- **H. B. No. 5793 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING GRANTS FOR RESPITE CARE SERVICES FOR CARETAKERS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE.**

Senator Harris, Representative Villano and Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee, My name is Susan Raimondo and I am the Community Programs Director at the Connecticut Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. I serve on the Long Term Care Advisory Council as the family caregiver representative. I have lived with MS in my family for 30 years.

Multiple sclerosis is a chronic, often disabling disease that attacks the central nervous system. Symptoms may be mild, such as numbness in the limbs, or severe, such as paralysis or loss of vision. The progress, severity, and specific symptoms of MS are unpredictable and vary from one person to another. In Connecticut 6,000 individuals have a diagnosis of MS and 42,000 people are impacted by this devastating disease.

The National MS Society is a collective of passionate individuals who want to do something about MS now—to move together toward a world free of multiple sclerosis. MS stops people from moving. We exist to make sure it doesn't. The Society helps people affected by MS by funding cutting-edge research, driving change through advocacy, facilitating professional education, and providing programs and services that help people with MS and their families move their lives forward.

The National MS Society Connecticut Chapter supports the following legislation:

- **S. B. No. 562 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING INCREASED ACCESS TO THE MEDICAID PROGRAM FOR THE MEDICALLY NEEDY ELDERLY AND DISABLED.**

Connecticut only provides Medicaid coverage for people who are elderly and disabled with incomes of up to 60 -70% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Last session the legislature raised the income level for Medicaid eligibility for almost every other low income population but did not raise the income eligibility for these very vulnerable people. The Medicaid income eligibility for this population has not increased since 1990.

We are urging the legislature to provide Medicaid coverage for people who are elderly and/or disabled with incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty level. This is the same income eligibility as for the parents and

caregivers of HUSKY children. Many people with disabilities living in poverty have to pay for medical services to meet their Medicaid spend-downs. Many forgo needed services, their health deteriorates, and more expensive services are required. Low-income older adults and persons with disabilities must not be left behind as the state expands access to health care. Raising the Medicaid income limit so that fewer people have a spend down, will help people who are caught in the “Part D trap”, and provide access to vital health care services for our most vulnerable citizens.

The National MS Society believes all people with disabilities should have access to long-term care that is designed to help people live as independently as possible and may be provided in a person's home, at other sites in the community or in managed residential or institutional settings. Due to the chronic, often disabling nature of MS, approximately 20% to 25% of individuals with MS will need long-term care at some point during the course of their illness. The National MS Society is a major player in the development of expanded home and community based services in Connecticut.

Connecticut’s 2007 Long Term Care Needs Assessment provides the state with smart and efficient recommendations to improve our long term care service system. The recommendations are also based on two guiding principles, which should be considered in connection with any policy or program changes developed to implement the recommendations:

- Create parity among age groups, across disabilities, and among programs through allocating funds equitably among people based on their level of need rather than on their age or type of disability.
- Break down silos that exist within and among state agencies and programs. Use the model of systems change grants such as the Money Follows the Person Grant and the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant to foster integration of services and supports.

Based on the recommendations of this survey and the work of the National MS Society, we support:

- **H. B. No. 5791 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY FOR LONG-TERM CARE.**

States that are leading the way in Long Term Care rebalancing have recognized that a Single Point of Entry is a critical first step in rebalancing. Families in CT need assistance in understanding the long term care system, options available and in learning how to make better use of their own resources or if they need help, obtaining supports through Medicaid or state funded services.

The bill would build on existing structure by giving the Area Agencies on Aging and the Centers for Independent living the first opportunity to assume the role of single point of entry agencies. This would build on the very successful CHOICES model administered by DSS and the AAAs, which provides Medicare and Medicare Part D counseling. H.B. 5791 would add Long Term Care counseling to the array of services provided by the AAAs and would provide resources to the Centers for Independent Living and AAAs so that both will have the capacity to integrate long term care information, assessment, eligibility determination, and care planning into their activities.

- **S. B. No. 561 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE MONEY FOLLOWS THE PERSON PROJECT AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A LONG-TERM CARE TRUST FUND.**

S.B. 561 would do three important things: 1) it would expand the Money Follows the person slots beyond the original 700 transitions, 2) it would establish a “Long Term Care Trust Fund” so that money designated for the Money follows the Person project, federal money received for Long Term Care and any cost-savings from serving consumers in the home and community would be used to develop long term care infrastructure in home and community settings and 3) restores and adds money for the CHOICES program that provides a foundation for a single point of entry.

As highlighted in the CT Long Term Care Needs Assessment individuals want choice in where and how they receive long term care services. We need SB561 as a step to providing a broader range of community-based choices for long-term care supports; the Money Follows the Person Rebalancing Demonstration Project will help to foster flexibility in home care delivery and to help simplify Connecticut's Medicaid structure.

- **S. B. No. 567 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT HOME-CARE PROGRAM FOR THE ELDERLY.**

As our population ages, we face more and more chronic illnesses and disabilities. The success of the CT Home Care Program for the Disabled Pilot is showing that there is a need for individuals who are younger than 65 to receive the same services that individuals over 65 get on the CT Home Care Program for Elders. Please pass this important legislation that lowers the age to 60 for eligibility for the CT Home Care Program for Elders. This will also help to transition some of the individuals on the Disabled Pilot to move to the Elder program, thus freeing up crucial resources for people 18-59.

- **H. B. No. 5793 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING GRANTS FOR RESPITE CARE SERVICES FOR CARETAKERS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE.**

Respite Care is essential for all caregivers of individuals living with chronic illnesses and disability. The National MS Society urges the legislature to support efforts to expand this important program that helps individuals with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

One of the main points of the Long Term Care Needs Assessment is to provide support to informal caregivers. Specifically, it states to "Provide assistance with training, financing (including incentives) and information for informal caregivers, including family members. Respite and adult day programs should be available statewide without age and specified disability restrictions. Caregivers should be a target group for education about long-term care services availability and financing."

The 2007 Connecticut Long Term Care Plan, developed by the Long Term Care Planning Committee in collaboration with the Long Term Care Advisory Council:

"Ideally, Connecticut's long-term care system should offer individuals the services and supports of their choice in the least restrictive and most enhancing setting."

The above legislation will help Connecticut to achieve this critical goal.

Please pass this legislation that will help to improve programs and services in Connecticut.

Thank you for your support.

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