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**TO: Senator Jonathan Harris, Human Services Committee, Chair
Representative Peter Villano, Human Services Committee, Chair**

FROM: Representative Michael Christ, 11th District

DATE: March 4, 2008 Human Services Committee Public Hearing

RE: Testimony in Support of Raised Senate Bill 562

Good morning Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. I am here to speak in support of **Raised Bill 562, AN ACT CONCERNING INCREASED ACCESS TO THE MEDICAID PROGRAM FOR THE MEDICALLY NEEDED ELDERLY AND DISABLED**. As you know, this proposal would make the Medicaid eligibility guidelines for our senior, blind and disabled residents the same as for adults who receive coverage through HUSKY A.

The income limit for the State's Medicaid Program for the Medically Needy has not been adjusted since 1990. Currently, the income limits are too low to allow many of our neediest low-income seniors and disabled residents to qualify for Medicaid. As a result, many are placed on Medicaid spend downs, until they accrue enough medical expenses to bring their incomes down and within the limit. If this happens within a six month period, they become eligible for Medicaid.

The spend down process is nerve-racking and dangerous. Continuity of care is interrupted as patients sacrifice doctors' appointments and opt-out of prescriptions so they can pay for heat, housing and food. For many, this lack of consistent treatment ultimately results in emergency stays in the hospital, which increase the costs of their care.

While looking into ways to improve the quality and accessibility of care for the medically needy population, I learned of a low-income disabled man who was able to live independently until his Medicaid coverage was interrupted due to the spend down.

Because he was paying out of pocket during the spend down period, he was forced to give up his home health services and without routine care, the man was soon hospitalized. Due to the exorbitant cost of his hospital stay, he was forced to give up his apartment. He is currently living in a respite program and looking for an apartment that he can afford on his limited fixed income.

I think you will agree that this is no way to treat our state's most vulnerable citizens. This program jeopardizes their health and ultimately costs taxpayers more money.

I would urge you to support this important legislation and make the income eligibility criteria for seniors and disabled people applying for Medicaid the same as for adults on HUSKY A, by establishing a special income disregard applicable only to the aged, blind and disabled.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.