American Cancer Society®

Appropriations Committee
February 20, 2008
American Cancer Society Testimony

Proposed Budget Changes to the Department of Public Health

The American Cancer Society is in opposition to any cuts made to the Breast and Cervical Early Detection Program (BCCEDP) as well as any transfers of money from the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund (THTF) into the General Fund.

During these challenging economic conditions it is understandable that difficult choices will have to be made. These are decisions that need to be made with careful and deliberate consideration, and we recognize the efforts of the legislature in achieving that end. As careful as these decisions need to be, there needs to be deliberation regarding the long-term effects that specific funding cuts may have. In 2009 it is estimated that approximately 20,000 Connecticut residents will hear the most horrible phrase, "you have cancer." If there are cuts made to the Breast and Cervical Early Detection Program as well as a transfer of money from the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund into the General Fund, the state will witness long-term health effects and millions of additional dollars lost, not saved.

The state Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program is a comprehensive screening program available throughout Connecticut for medically underserved women. The primary objective of the program is to significantly increase the number of women who receive breast and cervical cancer screening and diagnostic services. These services cover routine screenings and exams in an effort to detect cancers at its earliest stages when the chances for survival are the greatest.

These cancers have alarming incidence and death rates for Connecticut residents. Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among women in Connecticut; furthermore the state has the 12th highest breast cancer death rate in the nation. The survival rate for cervical cancer would be over 90% if all women over the age of 18 who are sexually active had a Pap test on a regular basis. While we have the prevention screenings available, without appropriate funding for this program, the screenings will not reach significant numbers of eligible residents.

The past funding has been inadequate with many eligible women unable to take advantage of the program as a result. Any attempts to further cut funding will more negatively impact the effectiveness of the program. Women are already being turned away from receiving screenings, and treatment sites throughout the state are no longer accepting patients. If we were able to fully fund preventative cancer screenings we could drastically reduce the number of cancer incidence and mortality rates. Cutting funds from this program reduces access to care in a time when we need to be looking for ways to increase access.

Connecticut incurs $1.63 billion in annual health care costs directly caused by tobacco related health care and it is estimated that 4,900 Connecticut residents will die from smoking related illnesses in 2009. Connecticut receives $12 million annually in the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund from the Master Settlement Agreement with Big Tobacco. As one of the leaders of the historic lawsuit against the tobacco industry Connecticut was once seen as a leader battling Big Tobacco. However over the years, little has been spent form the Trust Fund to support cessation services. In 2008 Connecticut spent $0 dollars and was ranked last, 51 out of 51 states (including Washington D.C.) in allocating funds to tobacco cessation programs. While the state did not spend any money, the annual health care costs associated with tobacco use increased.

However, due to legislation introduced in 2008 by the Governor and supported by the American Cancer Society, the Trust Fund Board now has the authority to spend up to 50% or $6,000,000 of the annual MSA deposit. As a result, the Tobacco Trust Fund has once again become an essential resource for tobacco related health care programs; it is helping support smoking cessation programs, the Quitline, and other educational campaigns to encourage people to stop smoking and prevent people from even starting. Maintaining funds in the Tobacco Trust Fund and allocating them towards cessation efforts will help save lives and significantly reduce the health care cost burden on the state.

There are individuals that want to stop smoking, but they need help. We need to safe guard all of the money in the Tobacco Trust Fund so we can provide those individuals that want to stop smoking the resources to make that happen, and by doing so we can see a decrease in the health care costs relating to tobacco use.

As these budget negotiations continue, the American Cancer Society stands ready and willing to work with members of the Appropriations Committee and other members of the Legislature to effectively establish a coherent budget which adequately addresses these and other health care related concerns. Cutting these funds now can only escalate the current economic downturn and result in a greater number of life's being affected by cancer.