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TESTIMONY FOR SUPPORT OF CONTINUATION OF HIV AND AIDS MEDICAID WAIVER

Tom Salemme
Director of Social Services, Leeway Inc

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I am the Director of Social Services of Leeway, Inc., Connecticut's multi-service provider to persons with HIV/AIDS, with Connecticut's first and only sub-acute facility dedicated solely to the care of people with HIV/AIDS and developer/provider of supportive housing for this population. I will present below an appeal to continue work on the **SUBMISSION OF THE PROPOSED HIV AND AIDS WAIVER**. Since Leeway's establishment in 1995, we have provided comprehensive sub-acute, inpatient nursing, medical and behavioral health care to more than 750 people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as established low income supportive housing to enable frail and marginalized persons living with AIDS to move back to the community. Leeway itself is a result of work by passionate health policy change agents who sought help from government officials like you 16 years ago – having identified a crying need for care for the state's most marginalized citizens.
Three years ago Leeway asked your assistance to obtain a waiver from federal law that would pilot the **provision of enhanced home and community-based services** for up to 100 Medicaid-eligible persons from across Connecticut who have HIV/AIDS **to avoid unnecessary or extended stays in a nursing home**. This impetus for this bill was the result of five years of research and analysis to document the need for community intensive clinical case management services for the state's most frail HIV/AIDS population who are seeking an alternative to admission to or extended stays in skilled nursing homes. Intensive community clinical case management services have been proven to reduce the overall health care costs for persons with HIV/AIDS by helping them better manage this complex, chronic disease while living at home. Additionally, these supports would help clients return to productive community living more quickly and free up scarce health care resources for those waiting to be discharged from hospitals to skilled nursing faculties.

And, in 2006, **you responded to this pressing need by passing Bill 511** AN ACT CONCERNING A MEDICAID HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE WAIVER FOR PERSONS WITH HIV OR AIDS. Work began in earnest last year at the Department of Social Services (DSS) to complete the application for this waiver for submission to CMS in Washington. **It is ready for submission right now!**

However, the proposed budget before the state legislature would delay the submission of the waiver application until 2011. It is short sighted to believe that

by delaying submission of the waiver will save the state money. In fact, the ongoing costs of keeping persons in skilled nursing facilities or hospitals are far greater than the cost of services in the community. To delay implementation of Bill 511 also would have an **untoward effect on the Money Follow the Person** project underway to move CT residents in skilled nursing homes back to the community. The AIDS waiver would have provided 100 additional slots for clients accepted into the MFP project to continue receiving community services after their first year of participation in MFP.

The **savings in lives, dignity and quality of life** – in addition to the dollars originally projected back in 2006 - $1.4 million in 2 years and $4 million in 5 years by passage of Bill 511 – **are only greater** after the passage of the intervening years. The AIDS epidemic is still infecting and affecting the lives of Connecticut's citizens at an unabated rate. I am seeking your help to remain committed to solving **a care delivery problem that continues to cost** our state, its taxpayers and those with HIV/AIDS countless **dollars**, lost productive **lives** and removing any sense of **hope** that we, as caregivers, can give. AIDS is no longer a death sentence; it is now regarded as a complex, chronic disease with some of the same management issues confronted by those of us with heart disease, diabetes or other chronic illnesses. But many of our state's most vulnerable AIDS victims are languishing in skilled nursing facilities like Leeway or in hospitals for far too long because sufficient support systems in the community are not reimbursed by the Medicaid program. It is such a shame that people like Steven or Carol or Charlie, adults who like you and me want every opportunity to live in the community but are thwarted for lack of funded support services. Our staff at Leeway lament when they have worked for months to bring a client back from the brink of death, only to have the client return to the community without supports and, in a matter of months, end up back in the ER, ICU and once again admitted to Leeway exhausted, emaciated and discouraged.

Please do not delay submission of the AIDS waiver to CMS. Allow DSS to continue its effort on the waiver, knowing its value in human lives saved and state Medicaid funds saved. Thank you very much.

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Hope happens