



SEIUHealthcare
United for Quality Care

New England Health Care Employees Union
77 Huyshope Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106
860.549.1199
Fax: 860.251.6049
mailbox@seiu1199ne.org
www.seiu1199ne.org

Testimony of Deborah Chernoff, Communications Director
New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, SEIU Healthcare
Before the Judiciary Committee re: SB 1004, *An Act Concerning Cooperative Health Care Arrangements and Standards in Contracts between Health Insurers and Health Care Providers*

Good morning Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and other distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Deborah Chernoff and I am the Communications Director of the New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199 of SEIU Healthcare, representing more than 20,000 professional and paraprofessional caregivers in our state. I am testifying today in favor of Senate Bill 1004.

As the largest union of healthcare workers in Connecticut, we are advocates for our patients, residents and clients, always working to secure meaningful health care reform. Ensuring quality care for everyone in our state cannot be achieved absent the collective voices and effective influence of physicians.

1199 represents about 80 physicians, psychiatrists and dentists employed by the State of Connecticut in public health care facilities and services. Those doctors do have a voice and are able to change or influence public policies to improve patient care for the populations they treat. Doctors who belong to our union can speak and act collectively on behalf of themselves and their patients.

For example, some years ago psychiatrists at Connecticut Valley Hospital faced a mandatory overtime dilemma they were not able to resolve without collective action. Some were working 14 hours a day for four days straight and worried that sleep deprivation would cause them to make a deadly mistake. The rate the state paid for overtime coverage was so much lower than that paid by private hospitals – less than half the going rate – that the state was unable to attract enough physicians to cover nights, weekends and holidays.

Because state-employed physicians do have a collective voice, the state opened up the contract, negotiated with the doctors and raised rates sufficiently to ensure adequate coverage by alert clinicians, improving state policy and the quality of patient care.

Insurance companies are committed to their fiscal responsibility to enrich shareholders, not their human obligation to assist policyholders. Every day, patients suffer and sometimes die because insurance companies make medical decisions based on the bottom line, not on the Hippocratic oath. Insurers will continue to exert a stranglehold on the delivery of health care in this country until we achieve a more rational, human and patient-centered health care system

Physicians in the private sector should have the same rights and opportunities to speak up and negotiate as a group when the policies and practices of insurance companies impede their ability to make the best health care decisions with and for their patients.