



Testimony of Suzanne Haviland, Health Policy Analyst

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Council 4
Before the Insurance and Real Estate, Human Services and Public Health Committees
on House Bill 6600, *An Act Concerning the Establishment of the Sustinet Plan.*
March 2, 2009

My name is Suzanne Haviland and I am testifying on behalf of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Council 4. In Connecticut, our union represents more than 35,000 state, municipal and private contract public service workers in Council 4, as well as police in Council 15, and health care providers in CT Health Care Associates. AFSCME is the labor representative on the state Health First Authority, is a co-chair of the national AFL-CIO health care campaign and co-founder of Health Care for America NOW! (HCAN).

AFSCME strongly supports the intent of Proposed Bill 6600 to move us towards guaranteed, comprehensive, affordable health care to all residents. Reform proposals must focus on slowing costs for everyone struggling with rising prices, including those who have health insurance. Sustinet goes far towards that goal by creating a public health insurance option with bargaining power and clout. It requires employers to contribute. It prevents cost shifting by expanding existing public program eligibility for uninsured adults. It makes critical system improvements (such as medical homes, focusing on chronic illness, health IT, and auto enrollment). It establishes a floor of benefits and allows workers to enroll in Sustinet if their employer's insurance doesn't meet that floor. It establishes government rules to prevent the private market from ripping us off and denying care.

We are especially pleased with Sustinet's inclusion of a self-insured, public health insurance plan as a choice for all Connecticut residents – building on a pool of public employees and HUSKY enrollees. Pooling risk through a public insurance plan should be an essential component of reform, and the public is on our side. Recent polling has shown that public insurance choice is very popular with the public. Obama's campaign plan has it. The Chair of the US Senate Finance Committee has a plan that includes it. Even the Commonwealth Fund, including representation from GE, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, just came out with a national proposal featuring a choice of a public insurance plan.

HB 6600 is an impressive document. As we move forward this session in the legislative process, some areas for further development include increasing the employer contribution, developing affordability guidelines for higher income folks, and broader patient representation on the Sustinet Board.

Our union understands there is a big cost of doing nothing this year. Most AFSCME members have good benefits, yet they feel the insecurity and system crisis firsthand. They grapple with un-and-underinsured family and friends. They are hurt by the downturn of the economy and attacks on their health benefits, and feel the impact of the cost-shifting onto the public sector that causes job loss and shifts in resources that worsen their working conditions. We cannot afford to wait.

Last week, President Obama made it clear he understands this cost clearly, saying, "The cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough . . . we can no longer afford to put health care reform on hold." He allocated a \$634 billion fund in his budget for reform, and is moving forward this week with the Health Reform Summit. Yet there is no formal plan for the reform reserve fund, and every idea will be on the table. Connecticut has an opportunity to help lead the nation's choices, and Sustinet can help get us there. Thank you. (end)
