

Jennifer Gouthier
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Chairman Harp, Chairman Geragosian, Representative Willis, Representative Miner and the entire Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jennifer Gouthier. I'm a member of Prime Time House, Keep the Promise, Advocacy Unlimited and NAMI as well as a member of various mental health boards.

How would you feel if you were having trouble seeing clearly and it was affecting your driving, work, watching TV and even reading the newspaper, or you were experiencing tooth pain every now and then and you knew you needed to make an eye doctor appointment or dental appointment before things became worse but you no longer had dental or vision coverage and you knew you didn't have enough money to cover either of these services. What would you do?

How would you react if one of your parents was on heart medication for a number of years and doing really well on them, but then the doctor went and switched those meds to something less expensive, but ones that weren't as effective or caused more side effects that were very unpleasant. Wouldn't you request or even demand that your parent be put back on the other meds?

This is no different from individuals on psychiatric meds and then being switched to other meds that aren't as or are not effective and/or also cause many harsh side effects.

It's already hard for individuals on Medicaid or SAGA to get dental and vision appointments; and taking psychiatric medications is hard enough, but having to deal with switching medications can be frustrating and very stressful. Many medications, not just psychiatric, cause vision and dental problems and we all know that as we get older our vision starts deteriorating and we encounter more dental problems. Wouldn't it be better to deal with minor vision and dental problems when they first occur instead of waiting until there are bigger problems or even emergencies that end up costing 3 times as much?

I know for me, being 6 months pregnant, having severe tooth pain a lot and not being able to get in to see a dentist because I was on spend down was very stressful. I knew that if I didn't get in to see a dentist soon and fix whatever was wrong that this tooth pain could turn into something much worse and that it could affect my unborn baby. Being in a high-risk pregnancy I went against a lot of the advice of my Ob-Gyn and went back to work were I was always on my feet just so I could get off of spend down and could go to the dentist. The good side of this is that I prevented any dental problems from affecting my baby, but the bad side is that I started having pre-term contractions, which were thankfully medically stopped, because of the stress and being constantly on my feet.

I also know that if I had to change the one psychiatric medication I'm on because it was put on the State's Preferred Drug List (PDL), I would probably end up in the hospital and lose so much of the progress I've made through the years. This would not only happen to me, but many, many others as well.

The Governor, as well as many, if not all of you have said that you wanted everyone in CT to have Universal Healthcare coverage. By putting Psychiatric medications on the PSL, by eliminating Medicaid coverage for all Dental Services other than emergency Dental, and by eliminating SAGA coverage for vision, you're-eliminating health care coverage that you supposedly say you want everyone in CT to have. Being able to see well, having healthy teeth and being on the right medications for you, to be able to improve your mental health are just as important for your overall health as is having a well functioning heart or having your diabetes under control.

Please don't eliminate or make negative changes to these important health care needs. It will only cause more problems and money in the long run.

Thank You.