



Area Health Education Centers

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Testimony of Joan Lane to the Human Services Subcommittee of the CT Appropriations Committee

Concerning Gov. Rell's proposed 2009 budget

February 18, 2009

Senator Prague, Representatives Hamm and Villano, and members of the Human Services Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the Governor's proposed budget.

I represent both the agency I work for – Southwestern Area Health Education Center – and the dental collaborative we chair – the Oral Health Bridgeport Initiative, or ORBIT. Since 1999, both AHEC and ORBIT have been deeply involved in the issue of improving access to oral health care for residents in the Bridgeport and Stratford communities. Although the primary focus of our effort has been on dental access for children, we are concerned about the oral health of the entire family.

The proposal to decrease dental coverage to adults covered under the Medicaid program would lead to serious health problems for many families. Indeed, with the known link between oral and overall health, limiting dental coverage for adults to only emergency care would likely increase the State's overall spending on health, as a result of the need to provide more extensive dental and medical coverage for adults suffering from a lack of preventive dental care, untreated tooth decay and other related problems.

The preventive value of routine oral health care services makes preventive dentistry and dental hygiene an extremely cost effective investment. Research supports the importance of consistent dental care for adults, as a strong predictor of good oral health for their children. We urge you to retract your proposal to eliminate dental care, except for emergency services, for the 230,000 low-income CT adults who are enrolled in the Medicaid and SAGA programs.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Joan N. Lane, MPH
Project Director, Oral Health Bridgeport Initiative
Director of Programs, Southwestern Area Health Education Center