

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Wednesday, December 9, 2009
2:00pm Room C (LOB)

RE: The Governor's Proposed Budget Deficit Mitigation Plan and the impact of the Governors Rescissions...

Good afternoon! My name is Dr. Joseph Pavano and I am an Optometrist working in the inner city. I am also a member of the state board of Optometry appointed by the governor, but want to make it clear today that I am presenting testimony as an independent eye doctor in New Britain and Bristol. My testimony today is that of my own and no way should be taken as the official opinion of the state board of Optometry.

Twenty three years ago I opened an eye care business that provided full primary eye care services to the people of New Britain. Primary eye care as you know includes routine and medical eye exams. Doctors of Optometry are independent, primary healthcare providers who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as diagnose related systemic conditions.

The Governors proposal for \$337 million in budget cuts is on the table and I wish to make you aware that there are multiple cuts to the health care and social services systems in this plan.

The major proposals that will be of concern to my patients include the elimination of the limited vision benefits in SAGA and eyeglasses for Medicaid adults. I realize budget cuts are necessary, but cuts in this area would be devastating to this category of citizens. I have always thought of T19 as a temporary program for individuals who were temporarily out of work and perhaps down on their luck. How are these folks expected to get back into the workforce when they cannot see to drive to their job interview? I ask you to picture yourself functioning on a day to day basis without your eyeglasses. Vision is an operational necessity for all of us to function daily... eye exams and eyeglasses are a medical necessity to achieve the same.

I am one of the rare Optometrist that do not sell eyeglasses. None of my income has ever been created by the sale of eyewear. Thus, I have no financial incentive in this regard. However, I know this population of patients that I work with on a daily basis... some of these folks with serious medical conditions such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, will be confused as to what is and is not covered. I can guarantee that some patients will not come in for their annual eye exams because they won't be able to get eyeglasses covered. Many serious eye conditions are diagnosed when the patient thinks they are there just to get a prescription for eyeglasses. In my office in New Britain, in a retrospective study about 47% of all SAGA patients ended up with a medical diagnosis that needed to be treated and followed. That means that nearly half of the SAGA patients that come in for eyeglasses are discovered to have a more serious eye health condition. These conditions will go un-diagnosed and undiscovered if SAGA vision gets eliminated.

In closing:

- There is a very limited vision benefit in SAGA – a program that assists Connecticut’s most vulnerable residents – many of whom are physically disabled or mentally challenged. Eliminating the benefit will simply mean some of the states poorest citizens will not be able to have assistance with vision care needs.
- Presently, adults receiving Medicaid can get eyewear paid for by the state. The proposal to eliminate this should not be adopted. Patients could have a documented need for vision correction as determined by an exam, but then not have the ability to pay for their eyeglasses.
- These cuts are being proposed right as the holidays are approaching. The timing for these proposals is wrong and there is no policy basis for them.
- I urge you to not allow cuts to these very important programs.

Thank You!

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