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**Connecticut
Psychiatric
Society**

*District Branch
American Psychiatric
Association, Inc.*

Statement on

House Bill 5172 – An Act Establishing the Connecticut Healthy Steps Program

House Bill 6600 – An Act Concerning the Establishment of the Sustinet Plan

**Public Health Committee, Insurance and Real Estate Committee,
and Human Services Committee**

March 2, 2009

This statement is being submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Psychiatric Society concerning House Bill 5172-
An Act establishing the Connecticut Healthy Steps Program and House Bill 6600 – An Act Concerning the
Establishment of the Sustinet Plan.

As physicians, we support attempts to make health care more available. Psychiatrists are concerned with
the number of people in Connecticut who are either underinsured or uninsured. They are the ones who do not
seek out or receive preventive healthcare. They wait longer to have their conditions evaluated and treated,
which in many cases makes them more seriously ill by the time they receive medical care. This is especially
true for those people suffering from mental illness who often times arrive at our hospital emergency rooms in
crisis, using scarce and expensive resources, when a primary care practitioner, seen at an advantageous time,
would have picked up on the signs and made a referral to an appropriate mental health care provider.

You have two bills before you today that attempt to insure the uninsured and underinsured residents of this state.
We are concerned that House Bill 5172 would exempt the managed care plans from following the state's health care
mandates, including mental health parity. As you know, in 1999, this legislature enacted full mental health parity into
law. The intent of this law was to guarantee that citizens of this state who need treatment for mental illnesses would not

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be discriminated against. By exempting mental health benefits, you are extending the stigma against the mentally ill, whose illnesses are real, and who deserve to have their treatment covered by health plans. In most cases, they carry on or return to productive lives, just as those with physical illnesses do. Mental illnesses affect nearly 25% of Americans. Over 50 million adults suffer from mental disorders or substance abuse disorders on an annual basis (Health Care Reform for Americans with Severed Mental Illnesses: Report of the National Advisory Mental Health Council, Am J Psychiatry 150:10, October 1993).

The high cost to society of untreated and under treated mental illnesses have been well documented. A National Institute of Mental Health sponsored-study revealed that mental and addictive disorders cost over \$300 billion. This includes productivity losses of \$150 billion, health care costs of \$70 billion and other costs (e.g., criminal justice) of \$80 billion. Further a recent study examining six major medical conditions -- including hypertension, diabetes, lung diseases, and arthritis -- found only severe heart disease to be associated with more disability and interruption of daily functioning than depression. (Id.) It is obvious that not treating mental illnesses is more costly than doing so. In its 1993 landmark report to Congress, the National Mental Health Advisory Council concluded that parity coverage for severe mental illnesses would result in a net savings of \$2.2 billion a year. In addition, a State of California study in 1994 demonstrated that for every \$1 spent to treat alcohol and drug disorders, taxpayers were saved \$7 in future costs.

Second, we would like to comment on House Bill 6600. This bill was developed with input from physicians, healthcare, residents' statewide, business, labor and policy makers and consumer advocates and Emphasizes primary preventive care; preventative measures. In addition, it also includes benefits for mental health parity which as described above is essential to the overall healthcare of Connecticut residents.

Since 1999, you as the legislature, have stipulated that those with mental illness have the same rights to treatment as those with any other illness. It is impossible to justify depriving this small group of uninsured citizens of the same benefits that other citizens receive. We hope that you will support mental health parity when enacting a universal health care plan.

**For more information, please call:
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