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6582

Testimony before the Public Health, Human Services, Insurance & Real Estate  
Committees  
3.2.09

In support of HB 6582, AA Establishing the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership  
and  
HB 6600, AAC the Establishment of the Sustinet Plan

**BY RON CRETARO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, Senator Doyle, Rep. Walker, Senator Crisco, Rep. Fontana, members of the committees, my name is Ron Cretaro and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits). We represent 530 nonprofit organizations, 300 of which receive state funding to provide health and human services on its behalf.

#### **HB 6582**

CT Nonprofits applauds Speaker Donovan and others for once again taking steps to ensure more comprehensive healthcare coverage in Connecticut. We support the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership, which will open the state employee health insurance pool to nonprofits, municipalities and small businesses. We thank Speaker Donovan for offering this option to nonprofits across the state that continue to struggle with increased healthcare costs.

Nonprofit employers, like many other employers, have been facing years of skyrocketing healthcare prices. Annual percentage rate increases in the double digits leave nonprofit directors struggling to keep costs down for their employees. No funding increases for nonprofits mean that not only can they not give their wage increases to their employees, but when healthcare costs rise, they are forced to pass that increase onto employees in the form of higher cost-sharing and co-pays. Nonprofit employees, who make significantly less than their public-sector counterparts, simply cannot afford these constant increases. It is a matter of sustainability for nonprofits as well as our ability to stay competitive as operating costs increase and income and revenue become more difficult to obtain.

Opening the state employee health insurance plan will allow smaller nonprofits to take advantage of a much larger pool with significantly increased purchasing power. The lower premiums and co-pays associated with this healthcare plan are a welcome option for our state's nonprofit providers. As we indicated last year, the cost of joining the state employee health insurance plan will not be affordable for all nonprofits, but it will certainly be a viable option for some. Again, we thank the Speaker and welcome this additional choice for nonprofit providers.

#### **HB 6600**

CT Nonprofits supports the Universal Healthcare Foundation's Sustinet proposal. The Foundation has been the leading force in advocating for quality, affordable healthcare coverage for all Connecticut residents and we commend them for their continued efforts.

With over 300,000 Connecticut residents currently uninsured, our state clearly needs of Sustinet. Overhauling our healthcare system to ensure that it covers everyone and costs are reduced is an economic imperative for our state. As I said before, nonprofit employers, like many other employers, have been facing years of skyrocketing healthcare costs that are growing more and more difficult to sustain. The high cost of healthcare puts all

businesses, including nonprofits at a severe disadvantage and leads to lower wages and fewer jobs. Worse off yet are the thousands of individuals without access to employer sponsored insurance. Many of these people are low- to middle-income individuals and families who are served by our state's nonprofit providers. It is a daily concern for our members that their clients do not have adequate, preventative healthcare coverage.

SustiNet merges state employees and retirees with HUSKY and SAGA participants into a self-insured pool. Others also eligible include: individuals without access to employer sponsored insurances; individuals with employer sponsored insurance that does not provide affordable access to essential care; and employers, including nonprofits, small businesses, and municipalities. SustiNet is a broad health benefits plan that will include essential services such as medical home services, mental health and dental coverage. It will accept all applicants, regardless of pre-existing conditions, as well as subsidize premiums and co-pays based on income. This is comprehensive plan that will bring much needed quality, affordable and sustainable healthcare coverage to Connecticut residents. Although, ideally we would like to see adults enrolled in the Medicaid program for the elderly, blind and disabled, some of our state's most vulnerable residents, be included in coverage under SustiNet.

Both the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership and SustiNet are important steps towards comprehensive healthcare coverage for all Connecticut residents. It is critical for our state to take these steps now; we cannot afford to wait any longer. CT Nonprofits believes that quality, adequate healthcare coverage is a right for all citizens, not just those that can afford it. We urge the Legislature to make these proposals a reality and ensure that Connecticut residents no longer have to go without healthcare coverage.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.