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**Testimony before the Public Health, Human Services,
and Insurance and Real Estate Committees**
Re: H.B. 6600 – An Act Concerning the Establishment of the Sustinet Plan
H.B. 6582 – An Act Concerning the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Policy Director
Connecticut Association for Human Services
March 2, 2009

Good afternoon, members of the Human Services, Public Health, and Insurance and Real Estate Committees. I am Maggie Adair, Policy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and to engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

Faced with a precipitous drop in state revenue and a budget deficit in the billions, policymakers must now make difficult decisions. CAHS believes that Connecticut's policy leaders should take the long view on priorities, preserving the integrity of programs and policies that support children, families, and the well-being of the state. One of the largest priorities is fixing a broken health care system to ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to comprehensive, affordable, quality health care. Health care reform is critical to the future of our economy. We cannot afford not to fix it.

CAHS is testifying in support of **H.B. 6600 – an Act Concerning the Establishment of the Sustinet Plan**. We also support two other bills that you have heard earlier today, including **H.B. 6582 – An Act Concerning the Healthcare Partnership**. We commend Speaker of the House Chris Donovan for his leadership role in his efforts to make health care more accessible and affordable for municipalities, nonprofits, and small businesses. CAHS has testified and spoken publicly in support of the pooling proposal in the past, and we see the Speaker's work on this issue as critical in moving toward broader health care reform.

Many of the bills that you have heard today address pieces of the health care puzzle. **The Sustinet plan, detailed in H.B. 6600, is the most complete Connecticut-specific plan for universal health care ever presented to the Legislature.** Sustinet is the product of the best thinking of experts and the combined ideas of many stakeholders. We applaud the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut for its leadership, tenacity, and vision in producing the Sustinet plan. **Connecticut must not shrink from this challenge and this great opportunity.**

Sustinet offers a high-quality health insurance plan that promotes healthy competition in the marketplace through new choices, and a new level of accountability and transparency. It invests heavily in evidence-based prevention strategies to keep people healthy, lower costs, and promote sustainability of the health care system. Sustinet addresses the uninsured and underinsured. It addresses inefficiencies, employs best practices that tackle care coordination and communication, and ultimately keep us healthier and saves us all money.

As advocates for low-income children and families, CAHS is very pleased with Sustinet's plan to improve health care access and quality to families on HUSKY and individuals on State Administered General Assistance (SAGA). More low-income people will be able to see a doctor and get the care they need, because once reimbursement rates rise, more doctors will take HUSKY and SAGA clients.

SustiNet proposes smart and logical ideas. For example, every person would have a medical home. What this means is one medical professional would manage a person's health care needs. Having a medical home would result in better coordination, avoid duplication of service, ensure appropriate care, and eliminate wasted health-care dollars. As another example, the plan implements universal health information technology. Health care records of one patient would be located in one central location, so different medical providers could see the entire scope of a person's health care history and needs.

A cornerstone of SustiNet is the creation of a large pool to create a critical mass of people, thus creating leverage and lowering cost. The pooling concept has opponents, many from the business community. Pooling exists in the private market place. Why can't it exist in a quality public health insurance plan?

Another key feature about SustiNet is choice. There is no mandate to participate in SustiNet. Workers can choose to remain with their current employer-sponsored health care plan. Businesses can choose to offer their current plan or they can choose to join the SustiNet plan. CAHS thinks expansion of choice in the health care system is a good thing. **Choice is healthy for the market place.**

Some will oppose SustiNet based on cost. Experts estimate that implementation of SustiNet by 2014 will cost the state \$950 million. **We cannot afford not to invest \$950 million in health care reform. Why?**

- With SustiNet fully in place by 2014, 98 percent of Connecticut residents will have quality health care coverage.
- No one will ever have to worry about losing health insurance.
- Medicaid/HUSKY reimbursements will rise to commercial levels, which mean more doctors will participate in the program and more low-income people will have access to good care.
- As a result of expanding Medicaid and HUSKY, Connecticut will receive an extra \$800 million in federal matching funds – that's \$800 million more pumped into the economy.
- One bill before you today, **S.B. 988 – An Act Concerning Medicaid Funding for SAGA and Charter Oak**, would bring in some of that \$800 million in federal matching funds by moving SAGA and Charter Oak under Medicaid. By moving the SAGA program under Medicaid, SAGA clients would have greater access to care and would receive more comprehensive health services.
- And it's estimated that employers and residents save \$1.7 billion in health care costs.

The current health care system is not sustainable. The ranks of the uninsured and underinsured continue to grow. Businesses are heavily burdened by the rising cost of providing health care coverage to their employees. Increasingly, small businesses are unable to provide health care coverage because they simply cannot afford it. As access to quality health care narrows, more and more people are not getting the health care they need, and they are getting sicker and sicker. As a result, the cost of treating much more serious conditions is going up. The health system is a drag on the economy and a drag on our people.

Just days ago, President Obama shared with the nation his commitment to reforming health care in America. His plan to build up a \$634 billion reserve fund for health care reform provides an opportunity here in Connecticut. Because of the work of national experts and the commitment by the Universal Health Care Foundation, Connecticut is ahead of the curve in the movement to build a new health care system. **We have the opportunity to provide the roadmap through SustiNet that can guide health care reform efforts at the national level.** Connecticut has a great opportunity and it's critical that we do not pass it by. **We cannot afford not to do this. Our people and our economy depend on it. SustiNet is smart, it's right, and it's time.**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.