

**Testimony to the Public Health Committee
In Favor Of
RB 1121
An Act Concerning Mental Health Parity and the Administration of the
Charter Oak Plan
Jeffrey Walter
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March 16, 2009**

I am happy to have the opportunity to represent the CT Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council in speaking in favor of Raised Bill 1121. This bill has three objectives: first, to assure that coverage of mental health and substance abuse is provided on the same basis as coverage for physical illnesses in the Charter Oak Program. Second, it gives Charter Oak members the external appeal process that other insured CT citizens have; and, third, the bill places the behavioral health coverage in Charter Oak under the oversight of the BHP Council.

The CT BHP Oversight Council was established in statute to assure accountability of behavioral health services provided under the HUSKY program. This council provides broad representation by consumers, advocates, providers, legislators, and state agencies; it has been successful in helping the Departments of Social Services and Children and Families achieve positive results in the short time the BHP has existed.

When the Administration created Charter Oak it decided to use the BHP provider network to deliver behavioral health services to Charter Oak members. Behavioral health benefits under Charter Oak are not equivalent to BHP benefits, nor do they comply with the State's existing parity statute; nor, I may add, is Charter Oak consistent with newly enacted federal parity legislation. Further, BHP providers were not given the right to opt-out of the program, thereby requiring them to provide services with greater limits and higher co-pays and deductibles, but at the same Medicaid rates as they get for serving BHP members.

The Oversight Council voted unanimously at its March meeting to support RB 1121 because the bill addresses the need for equitable benefit limits, appeal processes, and broad-based public oversight of this important program. As a member of the Connecticut Community Providers Association, I would like to add that CCPA also endorses 1121.

We urge your approval of this important legislation. Thank you.

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