The Potential Harmful Effect of Medicaid Copayments and Restricted Access to Medication for Connecticut Medicaid Recipients
Public Hearing Testimony of Kelly Phenix
2/11/2010

My name is Kelly Phenix, I am a resident and registered voter from East Hartford. I am here today to beg you to reconsider restricting access to psychiatric medications and imposing copays on Medicaid recipients.

I am a Medicaid recipient, and struggle with 11 chronic illnesses. I have been on State Assistance since January of 2008 when I applied for Federal Disability. Governor Rell is proposing that $3 copays on certain medical services and prescription co-pays of up to $20 on certain individuals enrolled in Medicaid be adopted. If the State were to impose copays for medications and/or services, it would have a devastating effect on me. I have 15 prescription medications that I need in order to live. I have on average 10 doctor appointments a month. My only income is the $212 a month I receive from the State. If copays are imposed, it would amount to more than 50% of my income. I would be unable to afford all of my prescriptions or attend all doctors' appointments, how do you propose I choose which medications to fill or doctors appointments to attend?

Last year the Legislature changed Medicaid language to include psychiatric medications on the preferred drug list. Advocates fought for and won the protection for people who are stable on their medications. Now we are being told that protection will be rescinded. Restrictions on access to effective medication are acts of budget desperation, NOT enlightened leadership.

Not all psychiatric medications work for all people; side effects, efficacy, dosing, and affects on cognitive functions vary by individual and disorder. I have personally experienced side effects that have left me with permanent damage in the quest to find the medications that work best for me. I have Bipolar Disorder with Borderline Personality Features, it took me 4 years to find the right combination of medications to be stable and achieve some quality of life.

Restricting access to medications leads to increased utilization of high priced services. Abruptly stopping any psychiatric medication can be life threatening. People with mental illness who go to the pharmacy and are told that they cannot have their medications or have to pay hundreds of dollars out of pocket will more than likely go without. This will result in emergency room visits and inpatient psychiatric care, which are more costly that the original cost of their medication.

I am terrified that the recovery I have worked so hard to achieve is at risk. I am begging you to consider the damage that will be done by the Governor's proposals. This is not just about a line item in the budget; there are over 400,000 Connecticut residents on Medicaid. Trying to solve the State's deficit problem on the backs of the State's most vulnerable residents is an act of desperation, I encourage you to be the leaders you were elected to be and work together to find an alternative solution.

Kelly Phenix can be reached at: 860.202.6950 or KellyPhenix@hotmail.com
225 King Street, East Hartford, CT 06108