

Please Reject the March 1, 2010 Budget Mitigation Plan
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony of Kelly Phenix
3/11/2010

My name is Kelly Phenix, I am a resident and registered voter from East Hartford. I am here today to ask the Appropriations Committee to protect access to medications and services for Medicaid recipients and reject the governor's March 1, 2020 Deficit Mitigation Plan.

As a Medicaid recipient, and a person who struggles with 11 chronic illnesses, access to medications and health services are very important to me. I have chronic physical pain, take up to 24 pills a day, and have on average 10 doctor's appointments a month. I have Bipolar Disorder with Borderline Personality Features; it took me 4 years to find the right combination of psychiatric medications.

It was recently announced that Connecticut will be receiving \$66 million in new federal Medicaid relief; these funds MUST be used to prevent further medical assistance cuts. This federal stimulus money is to provide financial relief to CT Medicaid and protect prescription drug coverage for dually eligible people on both Medicare and Medicaid. With the receipt of these funds, there is **NO REASON TO CUT SERVICES AND RESTRICT ACCESS TO MEDICATIONS.**

The Governor's mid-term budget adjustment proposals and/or deficit mitigation plan is proposing:

- Increased co-pays for dually eligible recipients;
- Impose co-pays on the **entire** adult Medicaid population – including adults in HUSKY A – for both medical services and drugs;
- Remove a critical protection for people who are stable on psychotropic medications;
- Suspend coverage of non-emergency dental services for adults under Medicaid;
- Restrict access to all types of health care under Medicaid by adopting a narrow definition of medical necessity

The Governor estimates a savings of \$33.2 million in both the current fiscal year and during the next year, from these Medicaid and drug access cuts. **THOSE CUTS CAN EASILY BE OFFSET BY USING JUST HALF OF THE \$66 MILLION IN ADDITIONAL FUNDS FROM THE FEDERAL STIMULUS MONEY.**

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. I attended the Pharmacy and Therapeutics committee meeting where psychiatric drugs were added to the preferred drug list. Most of the discussion about medications included the committee members being misled that this protection is and will remain in place. Please do not let this protection be removed.

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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 and need prior authorization, 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 than the original cost of their medication.

It is not easy to decide which programs and services to cut, I understand that, but in light of the recent federal funding this should no longer be a struggle for the committee. We have the funds, there is no reason to make the proposed cuts. Please tell the Governor that you are aware of the new funding and reject her proposals to this area of the budget.

**For Immediate Release
March 4, 2010**

**Contacts:
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*****MEDIA RELEASE*****

\$66 Million in New Federal Medicaid Relief -- Must Be Used to Prevent Further Medical Assistance Cuts

Hartford, CT (March 4, 2010) –Connecticut will receive \$66 million in new federal funds under the federal stimulus bill to provide financial relief to our Medicaid program and protect prescription drug coverage for people on Medicare and Medicaid (dual eligibles). The state can access \$40 million of that sum for the current fiscal year. HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced on February 18th that the funds are specifically intended to “help states as they struggle to maintain Medicaid.” She noted that President Obama recognizes “the critical role Medicaid plays in the health of our most vulnerable citizens.” (See HHS Press Release at <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2010pres/02/20100218c.html>)

Medicaid recipients have already been subject to serious cuts under last year’s budget. But the Governor’s recent (March 1st) Deficit Mitigation and Mid-term budget proposals would make further cuts to Medicaid and medication access. The below-listed diverse groups and state officials are calling on the state to instead use the infusion of \$66 million in new federal money to prevent any further cuts.

Some recent cuts impacting Connecticut’s low-income older adults and children and adults with disabilities include:

- Elimination of coverage for medications not on a dual eligible person’s private Medicare Part D plan. The state used to pick up the cost of these drugs.
- Co-pays for people on Medicare and Medicaid receiving drug coverage through Medicare Part D. This subjects them to co-pays up to \$15 per month.
- Restrictions on psychiatric medications for people receiving drug coverage through Medicaid or SAGA.

On top of these cuts, which are already causing significant harm, the Governor’s mid-term budget adjustment proposals and/or deficit mitigation plan, among other proposals:

- Increase co-pays for dually eligible recipients;
- Impose co-pays on the **entire** adult Medicaid population—including adults in HUSKY A—for both medical services and drugs;
- Remove a critical protection for people who are stable on psychotropic medications
- Eliminate eyeglass coverage for adults under Medicaid;
- Suspend coverage of non-emergency dental services for adults under Medicaid;
- Restrict access to all types of health care under Medicaid by adopting a narrow definition of medical necessity.

The Governor’s deficit mitigation plan estimates a savings of \$33.2 Million in both the current fiscal year and during the next year, from these Medicaid and drug access cuts. Those cuts can be offset easily by using just half of the additional funds from HHS.

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Section Header

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Alicia Woodsby, with NAMI-CT, an advocacy group which assists individuals with mental illness, said: "The state is asking those with the least resources – many of whom have serious and debilitating illnesses – to pay the biggest burden during this fiscal crisis. This is the second time now that the state would take federal funds specifically intended to prevent cuts to Medicaid and use them instead to fill other holes in the budget, while simultaneously slashing essential health care services to those most in need."

Kevin Lembo, the state's Healthcare Advocate, said: "While the fiscal pressure on Connecticut is intense, I urge the administration to honor the restrictions set by HHS Secretary Sebelius for the \$66 million. This fiscal relief is based directly on the actual use of Medicaid services by residents of Connecticut. This money is tailored to help respond to the need for maintaining direct services, and acknowledges the downstream physical and economic impact of barriers to care. I also encourage the legislature, in its budget oversight role, to ensure that this federal fiscal relief is used for its intended purpose."

House Speaker Chris Donovan supported the advocates' request, stating:

"I am pleased that the Obama administration understands the difficult choices states are facing during these challenging budget times. With the new Medicaid funds recently made available under the stimulus, Connecticut will realize a substantial savings in its expenditures. This money is intended to provide services to people who need them and I am disappointed that the Governor continues to attack this vulnerable population, inflicting cuts even when federal dollars are available to preserve services."

AIDS LIFE Campaign

National Alliance on Mental Illness, CT (NAMI-CT)

Disability Advocacy Collaborative

CT Lifespan Respite Coalition

CT Family to Family Health Information Network

Middlesex Coalition for Children

CT Legal Rights Project

New Haven Legal Assistance Association

Connecticut AIDS Resource Coalition

Center for Medicare Advocacy

CT Association of Area Agencies on Aging (C4A)

Office of the Child Advocate

FAVOR

Office of the Healthcare Advocate

Greater Hartford Legal Aid

Mental Health Association of CT

CT Commission on Aging

Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT

CT Legal Services

CT VOICES for Children

AARP Connecticut

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