

Testimony before the Human Services Committee

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"Oral Health for All"



Good evening. My name is Gretchen Vivier. I am the Interim Advocacy Director for the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI). COHI is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing 'oral health for all.' We work with providers, consumers and stakeholders across Connecticut.

COHI is here today to comment on SB32 **An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Social Services**. We oppose much of what is in the governor's proposal including increasing co-pays and premiums under HUSKY and cutting HUSKY Outreach. These cuts save money primarily by denying care. Without the 211 Infoline fewer residents will be able to access reliable information about, and help with, enrolling in HUSKY coverage. The increased co-pays and premiums increase costs for Connecticut families when they can least afford it. Their effect is to decrease and delay access to health care causing unnecessary suffering and increased costs further down the line.

However, we do support converting HUSKY from managed care to a non-risk ASO model and funding for HUSKY Independent Performance Monitoring. These are smart ways to ensure that the HUSKY program is efficient and effective. In that light, we also support SB 139 to mandate that independent performance monitoring continue without interruption.

State health care programs are important to everyone, especially during the current economic crisis that has caused many people to lose their jobs and their health care coverage. Others who fear they could lose their coverage any day can take comfort in knowing they will be able to keep their families healthy until better times come around.

A strong and healthy Connecticut requires a strong health care system. Children miss less school and learn better; adults miss less work and are more productive. The health care system itself also provides good jobs for Connecticut residents that, for the most part, do not go out of state. And access to good preventive care makes the system work better. Not only do families suffer less and spread disease less, but they also stay out of emergency rooms saving money for themselves and the state.

Decreasing access to health care coverage is just another example of trying to come up with a short-term fix to Connecticut's budget problems while putting our state in further budget trouble in the long term. The governor is proposing to cut efficient programs that keep children healthy and learning, keeps their parents productive and provides jobs.

Just as families are looking for ways to tighten their belts and cut waste, they also do their best to provide their families with important services like good health care and education. They find ways to bring in more income by borrowing, using savings, or taking on extra work. They aim to have enough income

- to provide for basic needs,
- to avoid taking short cuts that cost them money in the long run, and
- to put themselves in a position to thrive when the economy turns around.

The same balanced approach is needed for our state budget. While we need to look for efficiencies and other ways to save money, we also need to find revenue. Specifically, we urge you to support the revenue options proposed by the Better Choices for Connecticut coalition, including closing corporate tax loopholes, evaluating corporate tax breaks to see whether Connecticut is actually getting an economic return on its investment, delaying reductions in the estate tax and increasing income taxes on households most able to pay.

We cannot rely on further spending cuts in this budget. Dollars cut already outnumber revenues raised 3:1. Please do not let Connecticut's families down when they need help the most.

Thank you for your time.