

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY, PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

Hb 5452 AAC THE PROVISION OF VOLUNTEER HEALTH CARE SERVICES ON A TEMPORARY BASIS

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Dr. Suzanne Lagarde. I am here to plea the case for the passage of HB 5452 AAC, The Provision of Volunteer Health Care Services on a Temporary Basis.

It is a well known fact that the numbers of uninsured and under-insured CT residents is on the rise. US Census Bureau data shows the average uninsured rate in CT between 2006-2008 was over 10%. Current conservative estimates place the number of uninsured closer to 15%. In addition to the uninsured, there is also a significant number of under-insured. Even among the insured, many CT residents still find themselves doing without basic care, especially dental and vision care, because many commercial plans exclude these areas or because deductibles are so large, routine care is avoided. The end result is that a large number of CT residents, uninsured, under-insured and insured, go without basic medical/dental/vision care. Not only does this result in undue suffering, diseases go undiagnosed at an early stage when they are more likely to be cured, patients often end up in emergency rooms or as inpatients, when the cost of the care is exorbitant and borne by society as a whole.

As a founding member and current VP of Project Access-New Haven, a non-profit that works to ensure access to specialty physicians for the uninsured, I can tell you that the numbers of CT residents who need our services far exceeds what we can deliver. I also am a volunteer with Remote Area Medical or RAM. RAM is a non profit which provides free dental, vision and primary care in clinics throughout this country. However, RAM is seriously hampered in its ability to deliver these services when a request comes from a state like ours which does not honor licenses from out of state providers. RAM is ready to come to CT IF we allow them to tap into their network of out of state providers.

Although individual state licensing requirements vary, the core requirements documenting competency are comparable across state lines. When a practitioner applies for a license in a second state, one of the first requirements is documentation from the primary state that the practitioner is indeed in good standing. Hence, the risks to the public of allowing a provider licensed in one of the other 49 states to practice here short term is minimal.

As we speak, 2000 CT residents are receiving free high quality dental care at the third annual CT Mission of Mercy taking place in Middletown. Yet if our experience in past years is predictive of this year, we will be forced to turn people away. We have colleagues in other states who are ready to join us for such events and passage of HB 5452 would help this to happen. I sincerely hope that the committee can see the wisdom of passage of this piece of legislation.

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