

Testimony Supporting

H.B.6359: An Act Concerning Medical Assistance for Former Foster Youth

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Human Services Committee

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Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families. We are Senior Policy Fellows, concentrating in policy analysis and advocacy related to Medicaid and the HUSKY health insurance program for low-income families and children.

H.B. 6359, An Act Concerning Medicaid Assistance for Former Foster Youth, would extend Medicaid coverage until age 26 to young adults who were formerly in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Adoption of this change to Medicaid eligibility will go a long way toward providing former foster care youth with the same protections that Connecticut and the federal government have extended to young adults with parents.

Since 2008, Connecticut has allowed parents to cover young adult children on employer-sponsored insurance policies until age 26. Under the federal Affordable Care Act, this coverage option is now available nationwide under self-insured, employment-sponsored plans, and includes young adults even if they are married or living out of state.

As of January 1, 2014, federal law will require states to provide Medicaid coverage to former foster youth until age 26.

The State of Connecticut need not wait until 2014 to implement this change. Adoption of this bill will ensure that young adults ages 21 to 26 who were formerly in state custody and are currently living in Connecticut have access to health insurance coverage during their transition to independence.

Currently, about 2,400 young adults ages 19 to 20 who have aged out of foster care receive Medicaid coverage.¹ Many former foster care youth who are older receive coverage under other Medicaid categories. For example, a recent survey found that two of every three former DCF-involved young adults ages 21 to 23 were covered by Medicaid.² In addition, with the recent expansion of Medicaid to “low income adults” in 2010, many very low-income former fostered youth will be eligible for coverage. In all of these cases, the federal government reimburses the state for at least 50 percent of the cost of Medicaid coverage.

Staff of the Departments of Social Services and Children and Families can work together and with community-based partners to inform these young adults about the availability of coverage, the importance of preventive care, and the need to renew coverage to stay insured until age 26 if otherwise eligible.

While expanding Medicaid eligibility is difficult to contemplate in the current fiscal environment, it is the right and equitable thing to do for these young adults. The number of young adults who qualify for Medicaid under this coverage expansion is likely to be relatively small, but the benefits will ensure access to on-going preventive care and other health services.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 6359. Please feel free to contact either of us for further information.

¹ Active Medical Assistance Coverage Groups – Eligibility Report (March 4, 2011), Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS), available from DSS.

² Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative. 2010 Opportunity Passport™ Participant Survey (Connecticut). For more information, contact Jacob Siegel, Policy Fellow, Connecticut Voices for Children.