



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

Community Solutions, *Not* Institutions!

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Testimony before the Human Services Committee

March 15, 2011

In Favor of HB 6550; In Opposition to Co-pays in SB 1013

Good afternoon/evening Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg, Coordinator of the Keep the Promise Coalition, a statewide mental health advocacy Coalition dedicated to ensuring that a comprehensive, community mental health system is created and sustained in Connecticut.

The Coalition is in favor of Raised HB 6550, entitled “An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage for Smoking Cessation Treatment.” This bill would specify and expand the tobacco cessation products and services that are covered under the Medicaid plan. It would bring the state plan in line with the United States Public Health Service clinical practice guideline for tobacco use and dependence.

Services would include prescription and over-the-counter drug options as well as tobacco cessation counseling by qualified practitioners. Many people with mental illness smoke because it alleviates their symptoms. Unfortunately, people with mental illness who become addicted to tobacco products then often face a double whammy: the expense of trying to alleviate their symptoms is very high – many people with serious mental illness live at poverty level – and when they try to quit, they find that their insurance does not cover most smoking cessation products and services. This is a major factor contributing to the fact that people with serious mental illness die on average 25 years earlier than the general population. They are not dying from their mental illness – they are dying from preventable and treatable causes such as diabetes and smoking. We need to even the playing field by offering good health care coverage to people with chronic illnesses such as mental illness. A failure to do so is a failure to address costly health care policies. We must replace them with preventative and early intervention strategies such as this bill that are cost-effective and save people’s lives.

The Coalition is in opposition to the co-pays proposed in SB 1013, “An Act Implementing the Governor’s Budget Recommendations Concerning Human Services.” Although the proposed budget focuses on cost-effective, community mental health services vs. costly institutional and emergency care, the proposed co-pays in the DSS budget would affect many people who are served by DMHAS as well as DCF.

Studies consistently show that restricting access to treatment and services only end up costing more in the long run when people put off receiving the health care or getting medications they need and end up needing much more costly emergency or even institutional care. In this sense, the co-pays would counteract the intent to save money and instead end up costing the state more money in the long run.

On behalf of Keep the Promise Coalition, I urge you to pass HB 6550 (Medicaid smoking cessation) and reject the co-pays proposed in SB 1013. These actions are future-focused, sound policy decisions.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.