NASW National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

2139 Silas Deane Highway
Suite 205
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
(860) 257-8066

Karen Bullock, Ph.D., LCSW
Stephen A Karp, MSW, Executive Director
naswct@naswct.net

Testimony On:

Raised Bill 6308: An Act Establishing The Connecticut Health Care Partnership

Human Services, Insurance and Public Health Committees
February 14, 2011

Presented By: Stephen A. Karp, MSW, Executive Director

The National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter, representing over 3300 members, supports Raised Bill 6308.

As a small non-profit employer that is committed to providing comprehensive health insurance to eligible employees we have found that our options for coverage are extremely limited. First limited as to the number of insurers who will write a policy for a group of up to four employees and then further limited as to finding comprehensive coverage that is affordable given our organization's budget.

Currently the two pooling choices we have are the Chamber of Commerce and the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA). Together these two organizations have a near monopoly on the options available for many of the small nonprofits such as NASW/CT. These two options however require payment of membership dues in order to access their health insurance plans which is troublesome to us, because both of these organizations spend significant resources lobbying the Legislature for the advancement of policy positions that are directly opposite of the positions taken by NASW, CT Chapter. We do not object to these organizations lobbying on their issues however we do object to having to pay dues into one of these organizations in order to be eligible for a pooled insurance plan. Instead we have purchased insurance directly through an insurer, which means we have no buying power. The rate increase in 2010 was 24% and in 2011 was 9%, which is still significantly high for us.

At present three of four eligible employees have opted out of the health insurance plan. However, if all the eligible employees sign up for the coverage we would need to cut approximately $20,000 from the current operating budget, meaning we would have to cut staff hours or would have to raise the employee contribution on premiums to an unaffordable percentage.

Besides the value to NASW/CT this bill will offer many of our members in independent practice with an option for purchasing of health insurance. We estimate that at least 600 of our members in solo or small group practices and for those who do not have coverage through as spouse or partner finding suitable options for health care coverage is difficult and often unaffordable. Bill 6308 will provide these clinical social

workers, who are running their own mental health practice, with a choice for coverage that gives them premium rates based on a pooled plan.

Opening up the state employee health plan to small businesses and non-profits would provide such employers, including NASW/CT, with a pooling option for health insurance coverage that would not require us to be contributing to an organization that promotes a political agenda that is counter to our own. It will also build in healthy competition in the small employer health insurance marketplace, which the Chamber of Commerce and CBIA should, as advocates of a free marketplace, support. At the same time opening the health plan to nonprofits would expand the number of covered individuals in the plan, which should allow the plan to negotiate more favorable coverage rates and increase the amount of premium dollars in the plan's fund. For our organization it could mean having additional dollars for expansion of staff hours and for some employers even allowing for the hiring of additional staff. Opening up the plan will create a win/win situation, good for the health plan, the state's nonprofits and small businesses.