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Commission on Health Equity
Testimony in Support of HB 6305

Presented by

Raja Staggers, Executive Director

Good Morning members of the Public Health, Human Services, and Insurance and Real Estate Committees. For the record, I am Raja Staggers, Executive Director for the State of Connecticut Commission on Health Equity. In 2008, Connecticut Legislature established the Commission on Health Equity (CHE). CHE derives its authority from Public Act 08-171. The mission of CHE is to eliminate disparities in health status by race, ethnicity, and linguistic ability thereby improving health for all state residents. Our responsibilities include: (1) To review and comment on any proposed state legislation and regulations that would affect the health of the state's populations experiencing racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic disparities in health status; (2) To advise and provide information to the governor and legislature on state policies concerning the health of these populations; (3) To work as a liaison between target populations and state agencies to eliminate health disparities; (4) To evaluate the impact of policies, procedures, activities, and resource allocations on eliminating health disparities in target populations; (5) To review and comment on the Department of Public Health's health disparities performance measures; (6) To explore successful programs in other sectors and states to pilot and to provide grants for new creative programs that contribute to the elimination of health disparities in the state and for culturally appropriate health education demonstration projects; and (7) To submit to the governor and legislature an annual report on both a retrospective and prospective view of health disparities and the state's efforts to ameliorate those among the State's populations experiencing racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic disparities in health status.

I am here today to testify in favor of HB 6305, "An Act Concerning Implementation of the SustiNet Plan." People from diverse racial-ethnic, cultural, and linguistic abilities have much to gain from health reform. Although minority groups represent one-third of the total U.S. population, they comprise more than 50 percent of the uninsured. Further diverse racial-ethnic groups are more likely to experience low-income, are less likely to have employer-based health coverage, in part due to high unemployment or under-employment, which less likely offers coverage. In general, those facing social disadvantages are more likely to become ill and die prematurely or to seek much needed medical care too late when the cost of medical treatment becomes exorbitant.

Connecticut has great need for health services among vulnerable populations who lack health insurance, experience limited access to care, and who require a medical care system prepared for a culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse population. There is documented evidence that certain sub-populations in Connecticut have poorer health outcomes than the population at large. These groups experience reduced access to culturally competent and coordinated services, often resulting in lower quality care and delayed medical treatment. Racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities are particularly vulnerable, as are other groups that experience social and or economic disadvantages, such as immigrants, people with disabilities, and homeless populations.

Racial-ethnic, culturally and linguistically diverse populations will benefit from the SustiNet Plan. In proposing a high quality health care system and increased access to healthcare through the extension of health insurance coverage to CT residents who would otherwise go uninsured, SustiNet will improve the outcomes of Connecticut residents from diverse populations. Promoting culturally competent and integrated care models through SustiNet will not only improve the quality of care for diverse populations, but may reduce costs, leading to a long lasting competitive advantage over other health insurance strategies.

Disparities along racial and ethnic lines affect both health status and access to essential care. SustiNet supports the reduction of racial-ethnic disparities in access to resources that improve health while increasing support for healthy living by families from multiple diverse cultures. In the facilitation of health care workforce training to promote cultural and linguistic competence, SustiNet will further serve the state's diverse populations.

Through the expansion of healthcare to uninsured populations, SustiNet will support the elimination of health disparities by race, ethnicity, and linguistic ability thereby improving the health for all of Connecticut's residents.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of HB 6305.