

American College of Physicians, Connecticut Chapter
Testimony
House Bill 6305 An Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet plan.
Present to Human Services, Insurance and Real Estate, and Public Health
Committees
February 14, 2011

Senators Crisco, Musto and Stillman, Representatives Megna, Tercyiak, Ritter and members of the Insurance and Real Estate, Human Services and Public Health Committees, my name is Dr. Keith vom Egen. I am an internist practicing in Hartford, Connecticut and an active member of the Connecticut Chapter of the American College of Physicians. On behalf of our more than 2,300 members, thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony to you today on House Bill 6305 An Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet Plan. We commend the work of the Legislature, the Sustinet Board and the Universal Healthcare Foundation of Connecticut for the proposal before you that is the culmination of years of commitment and participation of multiple stakeholders. We believe this could serve as the basis of a system that will increase access to care, improve the quality of care, and be affordable as long as it is primary-care based.

We must first stress that there must be enough primary care doctors participating in this system, open and willing to see this expanded population of patients. This will require adequate reimbursement necessary for the "patient centered medical home" model (specifically mentioned in Section 11) to truly work. This includes adequate fee-for-service payment of office visits as well as sufficient support for case management and care coordination functions. Both are absolutely critical for all the work to be done to deliver high quality care and reduce the overall cost of care. The "patient centered medical home" model must be implemented in its entirety and not piecemeal or it falls apart. Doctors and other members of the health care team must be incentivized to do the work necessary to prevent expensive Emergency Room visits and avoidable hospital admissions. Overutilization of these facilities, a major cause of rapidly rising health care costs, can be reduced by making coordinated primary care more easily accessible. Pilot projects in other states are demonstrating that "patient centered medical home" models can save many millions of dollars for those state budgets.

Access to specialist care is also a critical component of a coordinated health care system. Specialist physicians must be available and willing to see these patients when the need arises. That will require both adequate payment and liability protection. Neither of these is met by the current Medicaid program, which prevents many beneficiaries from getting timely and convenient access to care. For physicians to participate in the Sustinet program, reimbursement must be at a level that adequately compensates them for the work they do. Doctors must also be able to practice without fear of frivolous lawsuits. The current language of the bill includes some narrow liability protections, but we feel these should be expanded to a level closer to the provisions in the initial Sustinet bill which covered physicians following established guidelines in treating patients. We are

confident that such a provision would generate significant cost savings by reducing the cost of defensive medicine within the program.

Those two issues are the most important in helping to maintain and increase the physician workforce in our state, both for primary care physicians and specialists. Recent surveys from the Connecticut State Medical Society have demonstrated the potential physician shortages we face in the near future, if you have not already heard enough firsthand reports from your constituents having difficulty finding a doctor.

Physician involvement in the Sustinet Board of Directors and other committees is critical. As currently stated in Section 3 (b), only one doctor, a primary care physician, is mandated. This is inadequate. Such a Board dealing with a significant transformation of health care delivery in our state must have a significant percentage of the total Board consist of different physician perspectives, both primary care and specialist. Having served on the Sustinet Patient Centered Medical Home Advisory Committee, I can attest to the critical need for input from physicians in active practice, especially in the world of primary care.

Our health care system is remarkably complex and currently dysfunctional. Doctors who live it every day are the practical experts who can fully understand the nuances of providing care to patients in the exam room, and the difficulties patients and physicians face in navigating the complex system. Everything in this bill can potentially impact that in positive or negative ways, and doctors have to be involved as this new system is developed in its finest details if it is to succeed.

The Connecticut Chapter of American College of Physicians supports the basic principles of the current bill but understands that work still needs to be done to meet the goals established previously in this testimony. We look forward to working together with these committees, the General Assembly and Connecticut State Medical Society to increase access to primary care and improve patient care in Connecticut.