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**Testimony Regarding H.B. No. 6305 An Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet Plan
Gretchen Vivier, MSW
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Good afternoon Committee chairs and members. My name is Gretchen Vivier. I am a member of the legislative committee of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). NASW strongly supports HB 6305. Implementing the Sustinet Plan would be beneficial to the people and organizations social workers serve as well as to the social workers themselves.

The Sustinet Plan has provisions that control costs – negotiating to obtain discounted prices and securing new and increased federal funding. Other provisions control costs AND improve the quality of health care at the same time – preventing and controlling chronic illnesses, increasing the use of health information technology, and using evidence-based medicine. These above measures could work well because of the potential size of the network.

NASW also applauds the efforts to track and reduce racial and ethnic disparities. However, my personal favorite provision is the one that states, “All SustiNet Plan members shall be provided with member identification cards that have an identical design.” That way the clients social workers serve who are covered under Medicaid or HUSKY will no longer discriminated against simply because of their insurance coverage.

Many social workers are self-employed or work for nonprofit organizations. Allowing them and their organizations to buy into this pool would open up new options for them. I have heard from many of our members that they would like to set up their own practices but could not because of the cost or unavailability of health insurance. One social worker believed she was the only one in her county who provided services for elders in their homes. Though she was thereby saving money for the healthcare system, that same system was unable to provide affordable coverage for her. In the end, she had to close her practice.

NASW is a small nonprofit itself and could also benefit from Sustinet. Our executive director tells me that our rates increased last year by 44%! In response, he increased the prescription co-pay and the rate went still ended up a 24% increase. In previous years the increases were in the mid-to upper teens, but this year we had “only” a 9% increase.

NASW is also generally supportive of H.B. 6308 An Act Establishing the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership and HB 6322 An Act Concerning State Prescription Drug Purchasing. Though we prefer the more comprehensive provisions of the Sustinet Plan, we feel that these bills take steps in the right direction.