

Testimony in Support of H.B. No. 5608

An Act concerning the implementation of Culturally and Linguistically appropriate standards in health care settings

Testimony of Margaret Steinegger-Keyser

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Members of the Public Health Committee: Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 5608.

I am Margaret Steinegger-Keyser, Executive Director of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Coalition for Equity and Justice (GHICEJ), an organization consisting of 27 member congregations in the Greater Hartford area. The mission of the GHICEJ is to address the most pressing issues, problems, inequities and opportunities throughout the Greater Hartford region, in order to achieve a just and righteous community for all.

Between 2009 and 2011, the GHICEJ engaged its member congregations in an intense process of conversation and awareness-raising to develop the public will to address health disparities in the region. In doing so we recognized how vast the topic is and yet how important it is for us as a faith movement acting for justice to have a voice in matters of health equity in the State of Connecticut. At one of our meetings in 2009 our members made this declaration to the broader organization:

“Health care is a race issue, a rights issue and a moral issue – therefore a moral shift is needed in how we approach things...”

This very strong declaration urged us as leaders of faith to identify, assess and act upon important health care issues and bring them to the attention of our legislators.

The CLAS Standards 4 – 7 highlight for us some of the most basic human rights any patient in the health care system should have. Being able to communicate to health care providers what matters to you and afflicts you clearly and accurately in your own language, and to hear a commensurably clear and accurate response from health care providers, is necessary for effective, trustworthy health care. It gives us as patients confidence in the services offered and makes us feel human, and being treated with dignity. This is what we as a faith movement stand for, and asks from you, as well, to support the enactment of HB 5608.

The 2009 Connecticut Health Disparities Report sadly estimates that 90 million people in the US have trouble understanding basic health information, (p. 135). And according to the Hispanic Health Council’s findings in 2006, during 2005 approximately 22% of Connecticut doctors reported

that they felt unprepared to treat patients with limited English proficiency (Hispanic Health Council 2006, 31-32). While we appreciate the efforts of our local health care institutions to meet the needs of our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients, it is imperative to understand the impact of such limitations on this population: the lack of understanding, of vital information necessary for both diagnosis and treatment, potential misdiagnoses, and ultimately the impact on the general health and well-being of our LEP population. It is the conviction of our faith movement that no person should ever feel that their pain, discomfort, and fears about an affliction are not being heard and understood and, therefore, not properly treated by health care providers, that is, those who have committed themselves to addressing the health challenges of our society. We have heard the plight of those who need more from our health care system, and so we in GHICEJ expect more from our health care system in Connecticut.

This act is an important attempt to close the gap between the health equity status of the State of Connecticut and the expectations raised by the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health. We can do this in this State. We can change the lives of thousands of people who need to feel heard, who want to feel comfortable with their health providers, who want to be treated with dignity and who want to be healthy

Therefore I ask the Committee to support HB 5608.