

February 14, 2011

Good afternoon, Representative Ritter, Senator Stillman and all the esteemed members of the committees jointly sponsoring this meeting. My name is Dr. Estela Lopez and I come before you as a member of the Sustinet board of directors created under Public Act 09-148. I am testifying in support of H.B. 6305.

The Sustinet board took very seriously its mandate to provide recommendations to the General Assembly to implement the Sustinet Health Plan. In its recommendations, the board attempted to balance the reality of the economic environment with a vision for health care that is universal, continuous, affordable, sustainable, and that enhances health and well-being by promoting access to high-quality health care that is effective, efficient, safe timely, patient-centered and equitable (as set forth in the Sustinet law). I believe we achieved this and that HB 6305 reflects the balance between fiscal prudence and long term strategic vision.

- In light of the state budget situation and the fact that health insurance subsidies under the federal Affordable Care Act do not become available until 2014, this bill calls for a phase-in of Sustinet's implementation from 2011 to 2014, and beyond. Our recommendations were to phase in implementation by bringing the state employee health plan and Medicaid and HUSKY under the umbrella of Sustinet, each keeping their own individual benefits and cost-sharing arrangements. We recommended Sustinet initially open up the state employee health plan to municipalities in the state, and then after the necessary business planning and feasibility analyses, open up the Sustinet plan to small businesses and nonprofits as soon as economically feasible, hopefully in 2012 but

certainly no later than 2014 when the health insurance exchange starts up. I am happy to see that HB 6305 build on these recommendations.

- This bill calls for primary care medical homes to coordinate care and actively engage patients in their own care, emphasizing smart management of chronic illnesses and prevention of over-utilization of medical services. It calls for electronic health records for more efficient and data-driven provision of care to improve quality of care and reduce medical error and duplication. It also calls for strategies for reforming payment methods to reward patient outcomes rather than encounters. The Sustinet board recommended that savings realized by these measures be captured and reinvested to increase reimbursement to health providers serving the participants of Medicaid and HUSKY. There were many ideas for ways to improve Medicaid and HUSKY and to expend funds in these programs both effectively for the health of our state's lower income, often unhealthiest people and more cost-effectively.
- In my role as a board member, I served as one of two board liaisons to the Disparities and Equity committee. The goal of this committee – one of the five established to inform the board's recommendations – relates directly to the vision for effective, patient-centered and equitable care. The committee recommended gathering racial and ethnic data in electronic health records and incorporating disparities initiatives into every aspect of the Sustinet plan. HB 6305 could be stronger in incorporating the committee's recommendations but I am pleased to see there is language in the bill language calling for multi-year action plans to achieve reductions in racial and ethnic health disparities and the prevention and management of chronic illness (which disproportionately affects low income and Latino and African American populations of the state). I am especially pleased to see that the bill addresses the need to incorporate smoking cessation into strategies for addressing chronic illness and disparities. The research literature richly demonstrates

that smoking cessation can be powerful in reducing health care costs long term, and improving health and well-being.

This bill does not reflect every one of the board's recommendations, but I implore the legislature to pass HB 6305 to get Connecticut onto a path of eliminating disparities and improving health so the state's residents and businesses can pursue economic and educational opportunity, to the their and the state's gain.