Council 4 AFSCME
Testimony before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 14, 2012

Good afternoon Chairman Crisco, Chairman Megna and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. My name is Matthew Brokman, and I am representative of Council 4 AFSCME. Council 4 represents 35,000 Connecticut public and private employee members.

We are here in support of HB-5013 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BOARD MEMBERS OF THE CONNECTICUT HEALTH INSURANCE EXCHANGE. Connecticut is putting in place the building blocks for successful health care reform, and the composition of the Health Insurance Exchange board is integral to that goal.

There is more we can do and should do to ensure that the voices and votes of consumers and small businesses are heard in the important decisions that are being made. In 2014, every resident will be required to purchase health insurance – it will take bold leadership to make sure they have a fair and open marketplace.

First, we need to fast-track this bill. Important decisions are being made at every Exchange Board meeting: from hiring a CEO to determining which benefits will be required of plans that are offered. We urge you to add consumers and small businesses to the board by March so their voices can be heard during these discussions.

Second, we need to make sure that powerful, vested interests that have a clear conflict of interest do not control the key decisions. An important part of health care reform was making sure that our health care dollars actually go to keeping us healthy, not to line the pockets of executives and advertisers. Handing over the small business exchange to CBIA, as the Board's consultant recommends, would undue that work. Small businesses and consumers need a public, transparent alternative to foster competition with private insurance.

Third, we need to make sure there are strong financial disclosure and ethics guidelines in place. The CEO and senior staff of the Exchange should be independent of the insurance industry. This is the best way to assure the public that the health insurance they will be required to purchase is being properly administered. Public trust in the Exchange is crucial to its success.

And lastly, we need to make sure we comply with new federal regulations which require that the majority of voting members represent consumers. We urge you to create additional seats for two consumer advocates, two small business representatives and give the Health Care Advocate a vote. The Health Exchange conducts much of its business in Executive Session, without public oversight or scrutiny. Having votes on the Board is our only way to make sure our voices are heard in those sessions.

Connecticut is far ahead of many other states on health care reform. That is because of the bold leadership of this committee and legislative leadership who began this fight many years before

federal reform was even thought possible. We thank you for that courage. And we look forward to continuing to work with you to put in place the right building blocks for successful reform.