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Written testimony of
The Connecticut Society of Eye Physicians
The Connecticut ENT Society

Support **S.B. No. 205** AN ACT CONCERNING INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR THE BIRTH-TO-THREE PROGRAM.
In the Insurance and Real Estate Committee
February 28, 2012

Birth to Three is an effective, important program supporting children with developmental delays and neurologic problems during their most vulnerable and crucial stages of early development. Developmental gains made from early, ongoing intervention can reap a lifetime of benefits, improving functional levels even as an adult. Ensuring every child who needs Birth to Three support has a chance to receive it is therefore a benefit not just to those children and their families, but to the state as a whole.

Early detection of children at risk is important in making sure that every qualified child has access to the program. Since many children who qualify for Birth to Three have either hearing or vision impairments as a cause or contributor to their delay, encouraging early screening for these deficits would be helpful in identifying cases for referral for further evaluation. Since most children have a source of medical care, the pediatric care provider is the best venue for early, recurrent screening. While other ways of outreach would be necessary to ensure universal access, these providers offer an easy way to reach the bulk of eligible children.

A significant incentive for more widespread and effective very early screening would be to provide adequate reimbursement to those providing that screening. To that end, we request that language be added to the Birth to Three statutes that requires plans offering pediatric coverage in Connecticut provide adequate reimbursement for vision and hearing screening by pediatric providers.

Although we support pediatric vision screenings as the best method of early detection because it offers a wide net, we also believe that there are some kids who should skip the screening and go straight to a comprehensive exam. These are children already known to be at high risk of developmental delays, such as a known family history of significant childhood eye or hearing problems, those born prematurely, those with neurologic deficits and early developmental problems, certain genetic syndromes, and similar cases. For children already identified to be at risk based on other findings, a full vision and hearing evaluation should be a provided benefit and fully covered as a medical necessity by payers.

A way to achieve this is by adding language to the revised statute that requires coverage and adequate payment for these services. We ask that you consider adding a new subsection to section 17a-248g to incentivize early screening. An example of what might work is adding a new subsection 17-248g (i): [New]. Sec. 17a-248g (i). All necessary and appropriate screenings for identifying children who qualify for Birth to Three programs, including vision, hearing and physical development or ability shall be covered benefits for all insurers offering health insurance in the state of Connecticut under section [xxx] and shall be reimbursed at generally accepted RBRVS levels and index value similar to other examination and management codes. All children eligible for Birth to Three services shall be provided a comprehensive eye examination by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.

Thank you for your consideration in improving access to this program by adding the above amendment to SB S.B. No. 205 AN ACT CONCERNING INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR THE BIRTH-TO-THREE PROGRAM.