

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR of SB 425
Shannon Bali

Honorable Senators and Representatives,

My name is Shannon Bali; I am a student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work and an intern for United Connecticut Action for Neighborhoods and Caring Families Coalition (UCAN/CFC). I am here today to testify on SB 425, An Act Concerning the State Basic Health Program.

I am support this legislation and hope that you will support also. The Basic Health Plan will provide tens of thousands of Connecticut residents making below 200% of the federal poverty limit with health insurance. Health insurance is a basic human right, and with our present healthcare system, these thousands of people are left without insurance or they are forced to go through the difficult process of Medicaid spend down.

In my time at UCAN/CFC, I have spoken to several individuals on Medicaid spend down. One woman's story stuck with me in particular. She is a Connecticut resident who has been through many challenges in her life. She was a substance abuser for a number of years, but decided on her own to go through the painful process of quitting. She pulled her life together, got a part time job, and deals with the issues of being a recovered addict every day. She has sharp, constant pain in her back, limiting her ability to work a full day. Because she is only part time, she does not receive health insurance benefits, but receives an income slightly above the Medicaid limit. She is subject to Medicaid spend down. When she does not have Medicaid, she avoids going to the doctor because she cannot afford it. When she is on Medicaid, she has a hard time finding a doctor in the Medicaid program. For her, it is easier to deal with the constant pain than it is to deal with Medicaid spend down. She told me she only goes to the ER in dire circumstances. She also said dealing with her pain is not easy. She knows she wouldn't feel the pain if she started

using again, but she also knows how bad that was for her. I'm amazed by the courage and conviction she has in dealing with her pain, but not succumbing to the lure of drugs again. At the same time, I can see how tired she is from the pain when I look at her. Despite her strong will to stay away from drugs, she looks as if she's lost all hope in ever seeing a doctor and feeling "normal" again.

When I mentioned the Basic Health Plan to her, her eyes lit up. There was a small glimmer of hope that maybe she would not have to live with this pain anymore. But she is a realist. She knows that hope is dangerous, and will not count on this bill being passed, even if it is in the best interest of the residents of Connecticut. The Basic Health Plan is so important for her and thousands of others like her: people who are hardworking, but unable to maintain a doctor and a basic health insurance plan because of their limited income. I urge you to pass this bill for the sake of these people. You have an amazing opportunity to make a positive difference in these peoples' lives.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my opinion on this bill. I would be very happy to answer any questions you may have.