

E.

Written Testimony Regarding the Connecticut Healthy Start Program
and Proposed HUSKY Policy Changes

Submitted to the Human Services Sub-committee of the Appropriations Committee

Submitted by: Christine Bianchi, MSW, LCSW

Chief Development Officer

Date: February 22, 2013

Good evening Senator Slossberg, Senator Coleman, Representative Abercrombie, Representative Stallworth and Committee Members:

I am Christine Bianchi and I work at StayWell Health Center in Waterbury. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the proposed budget cuts for the Healthy Start program and eligibility reductions for HUSKY A parents.

The Healthy Start program is a comprehensive maternal-child health program that utilizes strategies to reduce preterm and low birth weight rates. The strategies include:

- HUSKY application assistance
- health education and
- case management.

These are interwoven into a service delivery model offered throughout the state that positively impacts over 50% of the births by women on Medicaid. An independent evaluation recently documented the program's success at reducing poor birth outcomes and also, saving the state of Connecticut money. The proposed cuts would dramatically reduce the impact of the program.

The vulnerable low-income population will also experience barriers to health care coverage if there is a reduction of the HUSKY income eligibility guideline for parents from 185% of the federal poverty level to 133%. 30,000 HUSKY parents will be impacted.

I am concerned that the proposed budget cuts put at risk our most vulnerable populations by relying upon alternatives that have **NOT** been proven to be successful, nor have they even been launched at this point in time.

I repeatedly hear the "Health Care Exchange" proposed as a solution to the consequences of the cuts I describe. The exchange is currently under development. How can we assume that this un-launched program and to-be-built infrastructure will be able to adequately and successfully enroll over 35,000 individuals into the right coverage? This is an enormous risk we are taking at this time when there are no specific plans poised for implementation, no data collected, and no results to base our assumptions.

We are risking a delay in accessing prenatal care in the first trimester for over 5,000 pregnant women each year, which may result in poor birth outcomes. We are risking that an estimated 50% of the identified HUSKY A parents will not be willing or able to purchase alternative coverage on the exchange.

Phone: 203.756.8021 Fax: 203.596.9038 www.staywellhealth.org

Our Centers	StayWell Health Center 80 Phoenix Avenue, Waterbury, CT 06702 StayWell South End Health Center I & II 1309 & 1302 South Main Street, Waterbury, CT 06706	Driggs School-Based Health Center 77 Woodlawn Terrace, Waterbury, CT 06710 Open Arms at St. Vincent DePaul Shelter 114 Benedict Street, Waterbury, CT 06706	Open Arms at Western CT Mental Health Network 95 Thomaston Avenue, Waterbury, CT 06702 Open Arms at Salvation Army Family Shelter 74 Central Avenue, Waterbury, CT 06702
-------------	---	--	---

Lastly, these two cuts will hurt the low-income health care provider network in addition to the cuts already proposed for community health centers, private providers and hospitals. Healthy Start ensures that pregnant women and young children arrive for their appointments or labor and delivery with a funding source for their visit. Without this application assistance, uninsured rates would increase. In 2012, 19% of StayWell Health Center's patients were uninsured. The full charge of the services provided to these patients was over \$3 million. StayWell only collected \$310,000; less than 10% of the charges. NO healthcare provider can afford for this to worsen or be put at risk due to a newly proposed infrastructure that is hypothesized to be able to enroll patients into some kind of health care coverage; whether it is pregnant women or HSUKY adults.

Any recommendation such as the ones that rely upon the health information exchange as a solution to the deconstruction of the Healthy Start program or HUSKY coverage should be delayed at minimum for one year. There needs to be time given for the implementation of the exchange and the development of the enrollment assistance. At such time following the evaluation of the new program and infrastructure, a well-planned conversation can take place to determine the possibility of merging the infrastructures if no harm is done to the health centers who will already by have incurred multiple funding cuts.

Thank you for your consideration.