



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut

Chapter
2139 Silas Deane Highway
Suite 205
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
(860) 257-8066

Raymie H. Wayne, Ph.D., JD, MSW, President
Stephen A Karp, MSW, Executive Director
naswct@naswct.net

Committee on INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE Hearing
March 12, 2014
Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 6612

Submitted by: Steven Skrebutenas, BSW, NASW-CT member Board of Directors

Good afternoon members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. My name is Steven Skrebutenas and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 3,500 social workers across Connecticut. I am before you today in support of HB 6612.

As mental health and addiction services receive much needed attention in our state, families, educators, Mayors and Legislators seek ways to identify and treat those in our communities who are in need of treatment. In a focus population of adolescents, Connecticut has eight percent of youth aged 12 to 17 who have abused or become dependent on alcohol or illicit drugs within the past year. I am sure this committee is also aware that our youth are not for the most part finding their drug of choice from a shadowy figure pictured on an episode of Law and Order, but simply opening the medicine chest and misusing and abusing what has been prescribed for them or another member of their family. According to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health in this same population, Connecticut has 24% who suffered for a sense of hopelessness / sadness, 8% have had depressive episodes, 8% have had a Major depressive episode, 15% have suicidal thoughts and 7% have acted on those thoughts attempting suicide.

As a Social Worker, I have worked with consumers who have utilized specialized treatment for mental health and or addiction services. The consumers that I have worked with for the most part have been treated under their Medicare/Medicaid benefits. I come before this committee to speak on behalf of the families with private insurance. Connecticut has had a comprehensive mental health parity law in an attempt to provide equal treatment for those who have the flu to those who have depression. When we, as the insured seek medical treatment for the flu, we may make a phone call or visit our physician and without much thought and receive the treatment we seek. A family with a private insurance who has a mental health or substance abuse crisis has to have a pre-authorization to access their benefits. I have spent up to an hour on the phone with an insurance carrier to have needed treatment authorized. When a family is in crisis an hour is a life time.

HB 6612 strengthens what is already in place in Connecticut. HB 6612 has several key issues. Under "urgent care request", adding language to provide for substance abuse, mental illness and co-occurring disorders will provide the needed strength to ensure private insurers are following state and federal laws on health care parity. The bill while expanding the definition for urgent care will now reduce the time the health carrier has to make a determination to 24 hours. HB 6612 will help families access the care they seek by making sure that the person who works for the insurance company has the expertise in "child or adolescent mental disorder, holds a national board certification in child and adolescent psychiatry or child and adolescent psychology, and has training or clinical experience in the treatment of child and adolescent substance use or child and adolescent mental disorder". Under this bill consumers will be better informed of their right of appeal if denied treatment, through the promotion of Office of Healthcare Advocate. I urge this committee to pass HB 6612.

Social Workers in Connecticut assist consumers daily in making decisions that affect their lives, by passing HB 6612 you will not only help Social Worker more effectively help the consumers we serve but help working families across the state.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Skrebutenas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Steven Skrebutenas, BSW
Member Board of Directors
NASW / CT