

March 2, 2014

Re: In support of SB-325 (LCO 1369); An Act Concerning Medicaid Recipients With Complex Medical Needs

Dear Committee Members,

Hello. My name is Jillian Cacopardo. I am a physical therapist and have been practicing for 12 years, 11 of which have been at Gaylord Hospital in Wallingford. If you're unfamiliar with Gaylord, we provide care to those patients with complex rehab and medical needs in a long-term acute care hospital setting. I was able to enter the area of seating and mobility 8 years ago and have not looked back since, as this has become my favorite part of my job. I am here as a clinician to support passage of the Complex Rehab Technology bill, SB325. This is important legislation that needs to be passed to help people with disabilities get the specialized equipment they need.

As a physical therapist, I currently run Gaylord Hospital's wheelchair clinic. It is here that we are able to assess patients for appropriate equipment that provide them with mobility and proper positioning which will allow someone to get out of bed, mobilize within their home and community, and minimize their risk for pressure sores. This equipment includes but is not limited to be customized manual and power wheelchairs, back supports and seat cushions, custom molded seating support surfaces, and standing frames. The process to properly provide this specialized equipment is not something that can be completed in one day. This is due to the diagnoses of the patients we see and the complexity of their needs. Some of these diagnoses include spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's disease, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, and multiple sclerosis to name just a few. Not every patient is the same, nor does the disease process manifest itself the same from patient-to-patient. This is why a separate complex rehab technology bill is so important. Patients come in different shapes and sizes, as do their needs. These needs cannot be met with something that comes out of a box. They require customization, adjustments, and modifications to this equipment.

Customized equipment allows a patient with muscular dystrophy to independently operate a power wheelchair, as well as power seating functions, with only a small flick of his index finger, the only remaining functional hand movement he has left. This allows him to maneuver throughout his home and change his position, thus allowing him to not have to rely on his caregivers so heavily. A customized seating system allows a patient with a longstanding history of quadriplegic spinal cord injury to prevent further progression of pressure sores due to such severe curvature of his spine. This allows him to stay out of the hospital and keep healthcare costs down. A properly configured ultra lightweight manual wheelchair allows a patient to maximize his ability to propel his wheelchair 16 hours per day so he can return to college to finish obtaining his degree to allow him to work full-time and become a productive member of society.

The previous examples are real life stories of people I have had the pleasure of helping. These positive outcomes could not have been completed solely as a clinician. It takes the team effort of the provider along with the clinician to ensure that these outcomes can occur. As assistive technology professionals, the providers are responsible for staying up-to-date with the latest technology and upgrades within the seating and mobility industry in order to bring that to the patients we serve. Without this knowledge, a great disservice would be put on our patients, as well as to the public, because cost of medical care and frequency of interventions would be greatly increased. I rely on the providers to ensure the clinic has the right equipment to trial with patients to guarantee we are using least costly alternatives. I rely on the providers to have knowledge of the equipment in order to fit our patients properly to facilitate independence and upright posture. I rely on the providers to educate me on changes that are happening within the industry. I rely on the providers to actually provide the equipment to our patients. The most rewarding part of my job is when the team approach results in a smiling patient and caregiver.

If the complex rehab technology bill does not pass, there are serious consequences that could result, including putting our patients at risk for serious medical complications and increased health care costs.

Complex rehab technology is vital to the adolescents and adults with disabilities that I treat. It helps reduce healthcare costs and provides independence and safety. The Complex Rehab Technology bill will help improve people's access to specialized equipment and add safeguards to make sure only qualified companies provide these products and services.

Please pass this bill, SB325. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

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