

Program Review and Investigations Hearing
March 3, 2014
Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 5371
Submitted by: Karen Bermudez, SCSU Social Work Student

Hello members of the Program Review and Investigation Committee and thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion. My name is Karen Bermudez and I am a senior-level social work student at Southern Connecticut State University. I am writing in support of HB 5371.

Currently I am an intern at an agency within the Lower Naugatuck Valley that provides mental health services to children and adolescents. Many times there are barriers such as the lack of adolescent substance abuse treatment centers in the area which accept all insurances. The lack of such services results in youth leaving these issues unattended and untreated. Some of the adolescents have predisposition to depression and other psychiatric problems which in turn, lead them to our agency for mental health treatment.

The agency where I am interning, does not provide substance abuse evaluations or treatment and it seems there are not enough agencies which do AND accept all insurances in the area. While attempting to make referrals, I recall coming across just two agencies in the whole state that provided such services to adolescents and accepted their insurance. Unfortunately these agencies were so far out of the client's way, that the family did not even consider it an option because they would have had to drive about 45 minutes to an hour toward either of these two agencies to receive treatment. Many times, we have no choice but to provide services to this population, depending on the severity of the substance use, because the need for mental health treatment is so great. We have a few adolescents who have history of using marijuana and with the knowledge that this drug may worsen depression and cause lack of motivation in users, we question how effective our treatment really is.

I have also encountered many cases where children are in need of services for longer periods of time but need to be cut short because of the lack of insurance coverage for the recommended time periods. There have been times where a client is clearly in need of more sessions but is forced to end therapy because insurance is simply not authorizing any more sessions.

As a future social worker who will be in charge of handling cases like these, I know that it is imperative for committees such as this one to take action on this matter because the youth in our communities greatly depend on it in order to live productive lives and perform to their full potential. I hope that you bring this bill up in the meeting and take steps to ensure that our youth, the generation of people who will be in charge of taking care of us when we are elderly and in need of their help, are being given the opportunity to maintain good mental health regardless of their ability to pay due to insurance caps.

Thank you,
Karen Bermudez
SCSU Social Work Student