



Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Human Services Committee
March 11, 2014

IN SUPPORT OF

SB 408 AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH OPTIONS FOR ADULT MEDICAID
RECIPIENTS

Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals who live with mental illness and parents and family members of individuals living with mental illness. I am writing to you today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to support *SB 408 An Act Concerning Mental Health Options for Adult Medicaid Recipients*.

This bill would expand access and choice to mental health services for adults twenty-one years of age or older who receive health services through the state's Medicaid program. This expansion would be accomplished by adding licensed psychologists in private practice to the groups of licensed professionals who are able to provide Medicaid services and who would be covered under the Medicaid program as an optional service. Such psychologists would be those not connected to clinics or qualified health centers. We strongly support this proposal. Furthermore, we urge you to include in this expansion of access and choice licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs) in private practice. LCSWs can already provide Medicaid services for people who are on HUSKY A and B. Such professionals have extensive education and expertise working with diverse populations using a person-centered approach. By allowing them to be covered under Medicaid as an optional service, people, who qualify for HUSKY C and D, will have **much needed access and choice to essential services** to contribute to their quality of life and access to mental health care.

This expansion of access to services providers has been crucial, yet lacking, for years, and is becoming an even bigger issue with the expansion of Medicaid in Connecticut. We can be proud to be one of the states who chose to expand Medicaid to low-income residents under the Affordable Care Act. But this access for the tens of thousands who now have insurance coverage under Medicaid (as of February the numbers have exceeded 70,000)¹ is seriously hampered, or at the worst non-existent, if people now have health care coverage but do not have access to providers or have even longer wait

¹ Access Health CT bi-monthly operational statistics update. Retrieved from <http://415512gg5ga3d1m572z1uo2gov.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/02202014-Bi-monthly-enrollment-numbers.pdf>



lists for appointments and follow up treatment as has been the case for years. Expanding the professionals able to provide mental health services would also be enhance access and choice by having a more diverse geographic availability for people seeking help as well as giving people an option who may prefer private practices over clinic settings. According to the National Association of Social Workers, CT chapter, which conducted a survey of clinical social workers in private practice in 2012, the vast majority of respondents either wanted to be or were interested in becoming providers under Medicaid.

Additionally, in order to truly expand access to mental health services, reimbursement rates for mental health services need to be raised to adequate levels in Medicaid as the current rates do not cover the cost of services. This below-cost reimbursement constricts access to services due to providers not being able to include as many people receiving Medicaid in their client lists as they otherwise could and would.

In order to fulfill the opportunities and promises health care reform has given us, it would be prudent and in the best interest of people seeking health care and the state of Connecticut to expand access to mental health services by supporting SB 408, adding licensed clinical social workers to this expansion of access and choice, and address the inadequate reimbursement rates.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let us know if we can answer any questions for you.

Respectfully submitted,

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