



Office of the  
Healthcare  
Advocate  
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

**Testimony of Victoria Veltri  
State Healthcare Advocate  
Before the Human Services Committee  
In support of SB 408  
March 11, 2014**

Good afternoon, Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Markley, Representative Wood, and members of the Human Services Committee. For the record, I am Vicki Veltri, State Healthcare Advocate with the Office Healthcare Advocate ("OHA"). OHA is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health plans; and, informing you of problems consumers are facing in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

OHA supports SB 408, An Act Concerning Mental Health Options for Medicaid Recipients. Permitting independent psychologists to provide services to Medicaid recipients aged 21 and older is an important element of Connecticut's ongoing efforts to ensure adequate access to mental health services. Analyses of our state's behavioral health infrastructure repeatedly yield the same finding – availability of and access to mental health providers remains a challenge. The addition of independent psychologists to the network of available mental health Medicaid providers will begin to correct this problem. There was a time when services provided by independent psychologists were covered by the Medicaid program. Psychologists regularly manage a wide array of behavioral health conditions, effectively treating their patients utilizing a host of therapeutic techniques. Psychologists perform needed services that are not provided by other practicing behavioral health providers.

However, anticipated demand for services may continue to present barriers to access, even with the inclusion of those independent psychologists who choose to become Medicaid providers. Accordingly, we also support the inclusion of licensed clinical social workers ("LCSW") as available mental health Medicaid providers. LCSWs are integral providers in Connecticut's current behavioral health system with a long history of effective clinical management of mental illness both individually and in collaboration with other mental health

providers. LCSWs deliver at least half of the mental health services in the United States.

As tens of thousands of new Medicaid recipients enter the system, we must be capable of providing available resources to improve access to care. At least ten other states already allow LCSWs to serve as providers for their Medicaid population. Additionally, the Connecticut chapter of the National Association of Social Workers recently conducted a survey of members and found that 62% of respondents would be willing to accept Medicaid patients and nearly 70% would be available for emergency treatment after hours.

Adults on Medicaid should have access to a regular source of community-based behavioral healthcare. Permitting LCSWs and independent psychologists to treat adults on Medicaid will allow for improved access to care and permit a regular ongoing care source for many Medicaid recipients. Additionally, improving access to services for adults can contribute to improved overall health. LCSWs and independent psychologists can be part of a team-based approach compatible with improved quality and access to care while containing the rate of growth of Medicaid costs.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to deliver OHA's testimony today. If you have any questions concerning my testimony, please feel free to contact me at [victoria.veltri@ct.gov](mailto:victoria.veltri@ct.gov).