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From: Mary Boudreau <maryb@ctoralhealth.org>
Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2015 11:26 AM
To: HSTestimony
Subject: HB 6846 Testimony from COHI
Attachments: HB6846 Testimony 20150226.pdf

(Testimony also attached in PDF)

February 26, 2015
Human Services Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford CT 06106

Re: House Bill 6846 AAC IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Slossberg, Representative McGee and distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Mary Moran Boudreau and I serve as the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative. As the only non-profit in the state with the sole mission of "Oral Health for All", I am here to address the impact that the Governor's budget and the proposed budget cuts would have on the Connecticut residents who are covered by Medicaid.

You will be hearing from many about the negative impact this will have on the Medicaid –eligible population from the medical perspective. I am here to spotlight, specifically, the adverse impact these cut will have on oral health.

Loss of dental Medicaid is detrimental to adult health, nutrition, employability and self-esteem.

- Poor oral health and lack of regular access to dental care are directly related to **serious and expensive systemic** health conditions and diseases, including heart and lung disease, diabetes and obesity.
- The impact of oral disease can extend beyond a women's oral health to the health of her **infant and child**, including the risk of being born pre-term, with a low-birth weight or with a low-weight for gestational age.
- If dental services are **eliminated** for adults in 133-185% FPL, the state will significantly drive up healthcare costs.
- Emergency Departments will experience **dramatic increase** in visits due to dental problems. Dental treatment is estimated to be ten (10) times less than the cost of managing dental problems in the Emergency Department.
- Eliminating dental coverage for adults **negatively** affects children. Child **dental utilization drops** as a result of parents losing coverage and not visiting the dentist.
- Qualified Health Plans under the health care exchange **do not include dental services** for adults. According to the Access Health CT website, dental coverage alone will have out-of-pockets costs of **\$1,729- \$3,523** per year, per family of three. There is **no subsidy for dental insurance**.

Lack of dental care is an acute problem in Connecticut. For the past few years, I have personally interviewed people waiting for hours in line during the CT Mission of Mercy, the two-day clinic that provides free dentistry. The most common reasons given for the willingness to stand in line for five and six hours, are: 1) To get relief from pain, 2) To improve their appearance by replacing or repairing front teeth so they can find employment, 3) To feel better about themselves as they see their reflection and how others see them, and 4) Because they know that dental problems can lead or have led to health problems.

With these facts, it seems impossible that the parents who will be cut from HUSKY A will seek dental care, as they will not be able to afford dental insurance and the associated out-of-pocket expenses for the premiums and deductibles. The costs to the state will rise as more start using the Emergency Department for dental pain, resulting in a high cost for receiving a pain reliever and antibiotic, and not actual treatment of the dental disease in most hospitals, causing repeat high-cost visits.

I also want to address the children covered under HUSKY B. Though they are not a large number, for each one of them, the need for medical and dental care is necessary and will be compromised if asked to go under the health exchange. As I will let others address the medical issues, I want to remind you, though dental coverage for children under the age of 19 is embedded. If the parent or guardian does choose a health plan, it will most likely be the bronze level. At that level, other than the preventive dental services, any other treatment will be out-of-pocket expenses because the medical deductible must be met before any services are reimbursed. This will lead to many not receiving the dental care needed to keep them healthy, in school, eating a healthy diet and having good self-esteem if their appearances are affected.

The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative asks you to not remove parents, and especially pregnant women, off of HUSKY, not the HUSKY B children and have the expectation that they will purchase health insurance - let alone dental insurance. Oral health helps their overall health and well-being.

If we can be of any assistance, please contact the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative. Thank you for your time and your commitment to the health of all Connecticut residents.

Sincerely,

Mary Moran Boudreau

Executive Director

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