



Testimony of

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*Regarding the Human Services Provisions
of Governor Malloy's Budget Proposal
Appropriations Committee*

February 27, 2015

Good evening, and at this late hour, thank you for your ongoing attention to the lengthy testimony. I am Christine Bianchi, Chief Development Officer at StayWell Health Center.

With so many proposed budget cuts, I understand why the lines are long and the concerns run deep. In fact, it was quite challenging for me to know where to begin and what to address first.

As I read the proposed budget I started to feel like I was playing dominoes; typically a peaceful game. But somehow these documents felt as if the rules had been completely changed.

First I became concerned about the reduction in income limits for HUSKY A parents and pregnant women to 138% of federal poverty level. According to StayWell's patient data, this could represent a loss of a payment for more than 12,000 annual visits at our center. That represents over \$1.6 million in revenue. I've heard that it is expected that these patients will instead enroll in a QHP. Yet, there is no reason to believe that will be the case, certainly not for 100% of these patients. Do we assume they will no longer come to the health center for care? They will either still come and be unable to pay for services or postpone coming and ultimately have poorer health outcomes by prolonging needed care.

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Our Centers StayWell Health Center

80 Phoenix Avenue, Waterbury, CT 06702

StayWell South End Health Center I & II

1309 & 1302 South Main Street, Waterbury, CT 06706

Driggs School-Based Health Center

77 Woodlawn Terrace, Waterbury, CT 06710

Open Arms at St. Vincent DePaul Shelter

114 Benedict Street, Waterbury, CT 06706

Open Arms at Western CT Mental Health Network

95 Thomaston Avenue, Waterbury, CT 06702

Open Arms at Salvation Army Family Shelter

74 Central Avenue, Waterbury, CT 06702

Second I was stunned by the elimination of the Healthy Start program. Healthy Start is the only statewide maternal and child health program designed to provide low-income women and children with important preventive services that promote healthy pregnancy and early childhood. The current funding of \$1.4 million enables services to approximately 5,000 high-risk pregnant women and children - an efficient cost per participant of just \$280. Additionally, 90% of the program cost is eligible for a 50% federal reimbursement; Healthy Start brings 50 cents on the dollar of Medicaid match for a significant number of the state dollars allocated to it. This generates revenue to the state's general fund that would be lost if state Health Start funds are cut. And an independent evaluation of Healthy Start conducted in 2008 found that the program is cost-effective and has measurable cost-savings. This can't possibly be a program that should be eliminated.

Lastly, I read in section 18 that the Governor has proposed Increases to the cost-sharing requirements under the state-funded CHCPE program from 7% to 15%. Suddenly the dominoes of both my personal and professional life started to collide. In addition to working at StayWell for over 19 years, I care for my father who had a severe stroke at the age of 49. A few years ago, I was able to enroll him in the home care program and I am very grateful to receive 9 hours per week of homemaker services. I financially supplement my father as I need to. But unfortunately, my husband's position was eliminated over two years ago and the business he started hasn't quite taken off. So I wonder, how can we do more?

But again I find myself here begging as I have done for so many years for scraps to care for people like my father, for members of my community, for the jobs for the people who have been so loyal to me and my organization. Wondering, how can I give them the news of a layoff when Waterbury's unemployment rate remains over 12%. How much begging did UCONN Health Center have to do to get millions to build a new center, or begging to build a new rail system with a utility that escapes me. Sometimes I hear conversation about "those" people. But when I look at this budget, I see the dominoes that impact all of us. This budget causes vital pieces of our health care system, our support systems and employment to not just fall but crash in communities such as Waterbury.

Please reconsider alternatives to the elimination of these entire programs or coverage groups.