



**Testimony of Dr. Michelle M. Cloutier, Director of the Asthma Center,  
Connecticut Children's Medical Center,  
to the Appropriations Committee regarding  
*HB 6824, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017,  
and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue***

**March 6, 2015**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Dr. Michelle Cloutier, and I am the Director of the Asthma Center and the leader of the Hartford Childhood Wellness Alliance at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center and a Professor of Pediatrics & Medicine at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. I am submitting this testimony as a pediatrician and lung specialist in support of restoring funding for Easy Breathing in the State budget.

Asthma is the most common, chronic disease of children and the leading cause of school absenteeism. Asthma disproportionately affects low income children and children of color. In 2009, Connecticut spent over \$112 million for asthma care of which 69% or \$78 million was paid for by public funds (Medicaid or Medicare).

While there are many reasons why asthma prevalence is higher in the Northeast than in other regions of the country, the major reason for high asthma morbidity and associated cost is under-recognition of asthma, especially in children, and inadequate or inappropriate treatment. The Easy Breathing program has been improving asthma management and care for children in Connecticut since 1998 and more recently for adults. Easy Breathing is an evidence-based, proven effective, asthma management program for primary care clinicians that guides physicians in diagnosing asthma and in instituting appropriate asthma therapy. Since 2002, Easy Breathing has been supported in Connecticut with Tobacco Settlement funds that were transferred into the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund. Funding for the Trust Fund and thus Easy Breathing is not included in the Governor's proposed budget. We are requesting that the funding be restored for this program for the following 2 reasons.

- **Easy Breathing serves all of the children in Connecticut.** To date, more than 135,000 children in Connecticut have been screened for asthma and more than 35,000 children with asthma have been identified and now receive appropriate asthma treatment. These children live in 159 of the 162 cities and towns in our state.
- **Easy Breathing saves the State of Connecticut money.** For every dollar that the state spends, Easy Breathing saves \$3.58/child with asthma per year in reduced Medicaid spending. In 2013, the \$250,000 investment by the State resulted in reduction in costs

associated with asthma of over \$900,000. These savings occurred as a result of a 35% decrease in hospitalizations for asthma, a 31% decrease in emergency visits for asthma and a 19% decrease in urgent care outpatient visits for Medicaid children enrolled in Easy Breathing compared to Medicaid children not enrolled in the program.

Easy Breathing is now being used in 5 other states with similar favorable results. It is a national model for improving asthma care for large numbers of children in a cost effective manner and has won national awards from the Environmental Protection Agency for its success. I urge you to restore funding for Easy Breathing in the State budget because it improves health outcomes for children with asthma and the dollars it saves Medicaid far exceed the State appropriation that supports the program.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. If you have questions about this testimony, please contact Jane Baird, Connecticut Children's Director of Government Relations, at 860-837-5557.