



**TESTIMONY  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
Friday, February 19, 2016**

**HB 5044, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.**

Yale New Haven Health System (YNHHS), comprising Bridgeport, Greenwich and Yale-New Haven Hospitals, is Connecticut's leading healthcare system. With over 20,000 employees and over 6,300 medical staff, we are among the state's largest employers. We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony concerning ***HB 5044, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017.***

We are concerned about the failure of the General Assembly to appropriate funds for the probate court system as of July 1, 2015 and urge you to reinstate that funding for fiscal year 2017. Because no funds were appropriated for 2016, the Probate Court was required to increase all filing fees, including those for conservator applications and estate proceedings. Despite the 50 percent increase in fees, the Probate Court still experienced a \$6 million deficit for the year. Without an appropriation from the general fund, further cuts to probate court expenses will be necessary. This will likely mean that funds would not be available to compensate those who serve as conservators for some of Connecticut's most vulnerable citizens.

This represents a gaping hole in the safety net currently in place in Connecticut. Yale New Haven Health System affiliates, including Bridgeport and Yale-New Haven Hospitals, serve communities with a significant proportion of indigent patients who are unable to pay for legal representation and have families who are unable to assist them when they encounter difficulty with critical decision-making. These decisions include health care treatment options, living situations, applications for Title XIX and other important matters. Our health system is making concerted efforts to spread the word about advance care planning and encourage all our patients to think about important medical choices before the decisions become an emergency. However, the fact remains that such planning is primarily undertaken by those with financial resources and assets to protect.

Hospitals, indigent citizens and the state have all benefitted under the existing system that allows capable, caring professionals to assist these vulnerable individuals with some of the most important decisions they may ever face. Without such court-paid conservators, more patients will remain in acute care facilities, when the care they require could be provided in lower cost facilities or even their own homes with assistance.

Yale New Haven Health System hospital affiliates are safety net hospitals which by virtue of their size, capabilities and locations will continue to provide care to these vulnerable and needy individuals. It is of the utmost importance that you take whatever action possible to secure the funding necessary to maintain a probate system that provides a viable mechanism for those without financial resources to obtain the advocacy and support they need to live safely and with dignity. Creating a system where this work would be completely uncompensated will make it close to impossible to find qualified people to perform these services. I therefore urge you to restore adequate funding for probate courts, including funding for those appointed as conservators and attorneys for indigent citizens.

Thank you for your consideration of YNHHS' position regarding this important matter.