Legislative Testimony

Human Services Committee

Governor's Bill No. 7040 – An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services Programs

And

Proposed HB 6885 An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement Levels for Providers

Thursday, March 2, 2017

From: Dr. Albert Natelli
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Dear Senator Moore, Senator Markley, Representative Abercrombie, and Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Dr. Albert Natelli. I have been practicing general dentistry in Southington, Connecticut for over 20 years. In addition, for the record, I am also a part time volunteer instructor of dentistry at the University Of Connecticut School Of Dental Medicine, an advisory member to the Lincoln College Dental Assisting program, a former Town Councilor in the Town of Southington, and former candidate for State Representative in the 81st District. I have also been involved in treating patients at the CT-MOM event over the years and I have even had my wife join us at CT-MOM as she is a nurse and help medically screen patients at the event. Also, I work closely with our social Services Department here in Southington in treating local community members, either pro-bono, reduced fees or by accepting Medicaid as well as having a small nursing home practice. I am writing to support the proposed Governor's Bill 7040 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services programs with two caveats. Finally, please permit me to note that my testimony here reflects my individual opinion and not the opinion or position of any entity, including that of the University Of Connecticut School Of Dental Medicine.

With regards to HB 6885, it has been since 2008 or 2009 that the Dental Medicaid program has had an increase in fees. In fact the rules have changed in the middle of the game affecting the rates dental provider will be reimbursed because of cuts or cost saving measures during these years. To save money, the degree of difficulty of orthodontic cases has been increased, sealants for the number of teeth of children has been reduced; and the number of dental examinations and dental cleanings has been reduced from two per year to one per year, yes the rules change mid stream or mid game. And as if you did not know this already, dental providers are reimbursed in the neighborhood of 18 cents to 25 cents on the dollar. Is this really fair?

Over the last eight years our great state has gone from one of the worst to one of the best states in the union, providing dental Medicaid services according to the Pew Foundation. In fact we are an example for other states to develop and run their Dental Medicaid Services. Thanks to the hard work of past Governors and Legislators, today we have more than 1,800 dentists are active participants in the program. This has lead to one of the highest utilization rates in the country among children and adults. Due to the success of the dental HUSKY program, we are seeing an increase in preventive care while restorative procedures such as fillings and crowns are decreasing and a decrease in costly emergency room visits for dental pain and treatment; this means we are able to help prevent suffering. Do you think a cut to funding may affect these numbers?

Here is my first caveat and it is regarding HB 7040. Cutting funds or reducing funds as it relates to the nursing home Medicaid population and placing a maximum allowable benefit that is less than the cost of
upper and lower dentures i.e. a set of teeth or dentures (each denture allows a reimbursement of $550.00 thus two would be $1,100.00) does not make sense. One suggestion is to have this cap or maximum yearly benefit being discussed at $1,300 to $1,500 for adults. This will cover the costs of dentures and a bit more if needed.

My second caveat is with regards to eligibility. Eligibility for HUSKY A was reduced in 2015 from 201% to 155% of the federal poverty level (FPL). The Governor’s budget proposes to reduce that further to 138% of the FPL. I would like to refer you to the United Way of Connecticut 2016 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed) report. [http://alice.ctunitedway.org/downloadreport/] I would ask that you keep the eligibility at 155% of the FPL.

As the you and the Governor attempt to bring the budget into balance and at the same time address our mutual goal of improving health care for all Connecticut residents, we urge you to seize this opportunity to look beyond short-term fixes and embrace healthcare policies that will benefit the State and its residents in the long run. In the end we know oral healthcare is essential to overall health and well-being. Untreated dental diseases such as gingivitis, oral infections and other oral diseased may lead to complications associated with heart disease and diabetes. It does not matter the population children, adults or geriatrics. It is important that dental care be made readily available to those who qualify for Medicaid, to reduce disease, maintain or improve function and finally for dignities sake. Thus, adequate funding and or an increase in funding for this program must continue.

Feel free to contact me at 860-628-0385 if I may answer any questions for you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Al Natelli