Testimony Strongly Opposing S.B. 270: An Act Concerning Work and Community Service Requirements for Recipients of Certain Public Assistance Programs

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Human Services Committee
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Senator Moore, Senator Markley, Representative Abercrombie, Representative Case, and esteemed members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Karen Siegel, and I am submitting testimony today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. We want to voice our strong opposition to S.B. 270.

Connecticut has achieved insurance rates for children and adults that are among the highest in the nation, and this is due in large part to the state’s HUSKY (Medicaid and CHIP) programs. We know that Medicaid coverage reduces poverty, provides lifelong benefits for children, and helps to reduce infant mortality rates—in part by ensuring that women can access preventive care throughout their lives. The HUSKY program also boasts impressive fiscal efficiency with the lowest per member per month Medicaid costs nationwide. Further, the state share of Medicaid spending has remained stable since 2014 and was lower in state fiscal year (SFY) 2017 than in SFY 2014. S.B. 270 would erode this progress.

Connecticut’s Department of Social Services estimates that 72 percent of current HUSKY enrollees are either employed or exempt from work requirements due to age or disability. National analysis suggests that of adult Medicaid enrollees who are not elderly and not eligible for Social Security Income due to disability: 60 percent work, 12 percent are engaged in caregiving responsibilities, 14 percent experience illness or disability, and six percent attend school. It follows that the vast majority of Connecticut’s Medicaid enrollees would be exempt from a work requirement according to the proposed bill. Further, work requirements for other social services programs have failed to increase long-term employment or reduce poverty. On the other hand, enrollment in Medicaid is associated with reduced poverty and may enable some adults to seek work or continue working.

Women are at particular risk of losing coverage due to work requirements, both because they comprise the majority of Medicaid enrollees and because they are more likely to engage in caregiving for family members. According to national research, two-thirds of people at risk of losing Medicaid coverage as a result of work requirements are women.

Access to medical care through HUSKY gives parents the opportunity to be healthy enough to parent well and work consistently. Should S.B. 270 become law, eligible working and disabled
parents are likely to lose coverage. Verification processes can be particularly difficult for families with disabilities or high caregiving demands. Years of data from other programs show that complex verification processes pose a barrier to coverage for eligible families.\(^\text{11}\) The proposed bill also creates a catch 22 for parents who are unable to find work by limiting SNAP benefits even when unemployment rates are high or the family lives in a place that has few available jobs. Parents in these difficult circumstances would struggle to meet their children’s nutritional needs while covering other essential costs, such as heating and rent.

In addition, the logistics of implementing work requirements are complex. First, the legality of such requirements is debatable and a lawsuit is underway in at least one state that has received a waiver to implement work requirements.\(^\text{12}\) Second, some states have chosen not to implement portions of approved waivers due to high administrative costs.\(^\text{13}\) Federal guidance prohibits the use of federal funding to provide job supports such as the job counseling and data bank of community service opportunities required by this bill.\(^\text{14}\) The high administrative cost of both verifying work or community service status and providing work-related supports would be borne entirely by the state.

Finally, when parents are insured, eligible children are more likely to be insured and to receive care.\(^\text{15}\) Therefore, this proposed bill would impose high administrative and logistic burdens that are unlikely to increase the workforce but highly likely to result in reduced access to health services for working parents and their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony strongly opposing S.B. 270. I can be reached with any questions at ksiegel@ctvoices.org or at 203-498-4240, ext. 120.

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5 Many ill and disabled individuals do not qualify for Social Security Income and, so, were not captured by the Department of Social Services estimate. The DSS testimony also noted that 5,000 Medicaid enrollees who qualify due to disability are employed. See: DSS testimony to CT Legislature’s Appropriations Workgroup on February 23, 2018


