



Testimony Concerning:

House Bill 5039: An Act Protecting Health Care Fairness and Affordability

**House Bill 5379: An Act Establishing a State Individual Health Care Responsibility Fee
and the Connecticut Health Care Savings Program**

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Chairs and members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak on House Bill 5039: An Act Protecting Health Care Fairness and Affordability and House Bill 5379: An Act Establishing a State Individual Health Care Responsibility Fee and the Connecticut Health Care Savings Program. I am speaking about both of these bills together because they have the common theme of a state-based individual mandate, though both approach this concept differently.

As you know, the individual mandate is effectively repealed at the federal level starting in 2019. We appreciate that we are having the discussion here at the state legislature on what we can do in Connecticut to preserve gains made under the Affordable Care Act – but we propose that not only do we have to make sure we don't go backwards, but we must, more importantly, keep moving Connecticut forward.

Recommendations for Implementing an Individual Mandate and Penalty

While we demand that our leaders begin to think boldly, and make sure that all stakeholders, especially everyday people, are at the table, too, helping to find solutions, we also want to make sure that if the state does pursue an individual mandate, it includes some critical provisions.

If the state decides to institute an individual mandate, it *must* include:

- The preservation of quality health care plans and protections, including Essential Health Benefits, guaranteed issue, and a ban on lifetime or annual caps;
- A ban on sub-par plans, such as short-term health insurance policies, and not open the door for other sub-par plans, such as the Low Option Benefit Design; and
- A method for utilizing penalty dollars to help people, as well as including consulting consumers on what solution works for them, as well as consumer input on the design of such a program; Some examples:

- The Health Care Premium Assistance Fund proposed in HB 5039, though we have questions about how this fund will work, including who will be eligible to receive such dollars, and how people will access these premium assistance funds
- A proposal put forth by Ted Doolittle, the State Healthcare Advocate, where penalty dollars are put into “a new type of personal health responsibility investment account owned by the uninsured person,”ⁱⁱ similar to what is proposed in HB 5379 (Connecticut Health Care Savings Program);
- A similar a proposal in Maryland, which uses the penalty dollars to help people pay for health insurance on the exchangeⁱⁱ
- Additional subsidies, such as for people above the 400% FPL threshold who are ineligible for Advanced Premium Tax Credits
- Other important consumer services, such funding in-person assistance and other outreach

A Vision Of Health Care For Connecticut

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut envisions a state where everyone has access to quality, affordable health care. At the Foundation, we believe the following principles are critical for that vision:

- **Universality:** Access to coverage and care when and where you need it, leaving no one out
- **Continuous coverage:** No gaps in coverage throughout your life
- **Affordability:** A solution that is affordable for all income levels
- **Sustainability:** For the economy
- **Healthy Outcomes:** High quality, safe care that promotes health, which is:
 - **Comprehensive:** Medical, behavioral health, dental, vision, medication, women’s reproductive health, and preventive care
 - **Equitable:** Culturally and linguistically appropriate, does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, religion, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, immigration status, or zip code
 - **Keeps you healthy:** Coordinated and patient-centered care, with attention to social determinants of health and healthy communities

An Individual Mandate Is a Band Aid

We have an opportunity in Connecticut to really roll our sleeves up and find creative, innovative solutions. The Affordable Care Act is a critical building block towards universal, affordable, quality coverage for all – but a variety of challenges have been deteriorating that progress:

- There are concerns that we may not have any health carriers on the state exchange in the future.
- Costs are a major barrier to coverage and care for consumers, especially for those who don't receive financial help on the exchange for premiums or cost sharing, and for employees who are seeing more and more cost sharing and out-of-pocket expenses under their employer-sponsored plans.
- Federal changes to regulations related to the ACA are moving away from the overarching goal of the Affordable Care Act – access to quality, affordable coverage. We've seen federal changes that are going to raise costs, such as the lack of funding for Cost Sharing Reductions, which raised premiums on the individual market this year, and federal changes that will reduce the quality of plans by reducing consumer protections and benefits, as well as allowing the sale of junk insurance – cheap, skimpy plans that don't really cover what people need, like selling a car with no seatbelts.

We challenge state legislators and leaders to really consider whether we want to continue to fill the holes in this boat – or if we want to build a whole new boat altogether. We cannot continue to only defend our health care at the federal and state level; it is time to quit fighting the same old battles and start making progress to universal, affordable, quality coverage.

There is a proposal for a Medicaid Public Option in the legislature this year – those are the sorts of bold, creative ideas we should be pursuing. We are long overdue for real solutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue.

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut's mission is to serve as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a democratic health system that provides universal access to quality, affordable health care and promotes health in Connecticut. We believe that health care is a fundamental right and that our work is part of a broader movement for social and economic justice.

ⁱ See [Op-Ed: Replacing the Individual Mandate With Something Better](#), Ted Doolittle, State Healthcare Advocate, Jan. 17, 2018, CT News Junkie

ⁱⁱ See [Transforming the Federal Individual Mandate into State Health Insurance Down Payments](#), Stan Dorn, Jan. 11, 2018, FamiliesUSA