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United for Quality Care

Testimony of Deborah Chernoff, Public Policy Director
New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, SEIU
Before the Insurance and Real Estate Committee
RE: HB 5384, An Act Concerning Prescription Drug Costs.

District 1199 is Connecticut's largest union of health care workers, comprised of some 28,000 doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, mental health and social service caregivers, nursing assistants and support staff. Whether we work in hospitals or nursing homes, social service agencies or community health centers, in the public or the private sector, 1199 members see daily how soaring prescription drug prices undermine personal and public health. For that reason, and many more, **we cannot support HB 5384 as currently proposed.**

Of course, we strongly support efforts to contain prescription drug costs, but this legislation will not make any real progress in that direction. This bill does include provisions that increase transparency around Pharmacy Benefit Managers (Section 1) and drug cost information (Section 3). While transparency is necessary, it is hardly sufficient to rein in sudden spikes in pharmaceutical costs, price gouging by pharmaceutical corporations and corporate interests that set maximizing profits ahead of enhancing health.

As health care workers, we see the results when our patients must choose between paying for the prescriptions they need to stay healthy and putting food on the table or gas in the car. As health care consumers, we feel the effects as our own insurance premiums and co-pays soar, driven by the relentless rise in drug costs. And as a labor union, our ability to successfully bargain contracts that provide the livable wages, sufficient benefits and working conditions required for the delivery of quality care hampered by rising health care costs for the employers we negotiate with. Whatever economic progress could be made for working families is eaten up by employers passing on their rising insurance costs in the form of higher deductibles, higher co-pays, higher premiums, and, all too frequently, inferior coverage.

We need to tackle this critical threat to our collective health by taking on the pharmaceutical corporations, Pharmacy Benefit Managers and insurance companies that together are driving the surge in health care costs. HB 5834 will not set us on that path. As health care providers, health care consumers and health care advocates, the members of District 1199 urge this Committee to commit to stronger measures to end skyrocketing drug prices. Those measures should include implementing the Connecticut Healthcare Cabinet's recommendation to establish a Drug Review Board to investigate pricing abuses and empowering the Attorney General to act against any price gouging that might be uncovered by that Board.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of our 28,000 Connecticut caregivers, their families and the patients, residents and clients we care for and support every day.

Tuesday, March 6, 2018