Bill No.: HB-7166
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING NONEMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION FOR MEDICAID BENEFICIARIES.
Vote Date: 3/7/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 2/28/2019
File No.: 94

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill would establish a statutory right to timely and appropriate nonemergency medical transportation for Medicaid beneficiaries and to provide a timelier avenue for such beneficiaries to appeal coverage lapses.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Roderick L. Bremby, Commissioner of CT Department of Social Services; believes this bill is unnecessary as the proposed requirements already appear in the NEMT contract with the provider, Veyo. Commissioner Bremby stated the goal of the agency in the administration of the states Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) is to provide person-centered, medically necessary, timely and high quality services to Medicaid members. The Department reviewed each requirement proposed in this bill as noted in their testimony and believes all are incorporated in the current contract.

Joshua, Komenda, President of Veyo: Since becoming the NEMT for the state of CT in January 2018, the agency over 4.3 million trips have been managed with a 0.03 % grievance rate. With a 20% increase since 2017, there has been a dramatic demand for service over the year. The challenge has been to keep pace with meeting the demand. Veyo has partnered with over 80 commercial providers managing over 1,400 commercial vehicles and 250 independent driver providers (IDPs). Veyo noted the current contract with DSS addresses concerns mentioned in the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:
Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance; supports the bill. The bill would establish a statutory right to timely and appropriate nonemergency medical transportation for members and an avenue for timely appeal. The history of the transportation services from Logisticare and then Veyo indicates continued issues with training and staffing, the call center, ride-scheduling, issuing bus passes and wait times as well as misidentified transportation needs. All have led to missed appointments in basic medical care, addictions treatment and behavioral healthcare.

Kelly Phenix, member of the Behavioral Health Oversight Council (BHPOC) and Medical Assistance Program Oversight Council (MAPOC), co-chair of the Coordination of Care subcommittee and Husky member; supports the bill with the following revisions: 1. an independent third party audit of the NET transportation broker, Veyo. Money needed for the audit can be used from the Mercer Account and 2. Returning the money collected from sanctions back to DSS. While there have been improvements there continue to many issues that affect member’s health and costing the state additional dollars to fix.

Kathy Flaherty, Esq., Executive Director, Ct Legal Rights Project and Co-Chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition; supports the bill. The lack of enforcement in the contract allows people to miss or arrive late to necessary appointments and as a result of missed appointment’s people are discharged for non-compliance. People who are unable to appropriately attend treatment in a timely manner can also become sicker. An ongoing work group made up of all stakeholders as well as imposing monthly reporting requirements could be considered by the Committee.

Matthew Dillon, Esq., CT Legal Services; supports the bill. Veyo has been administering nonemergency transportation in CT since January 2018. A primary complaint has been sending clients the wrong type of transportation. An example given was a person suffering from a mental illness such as anxiety or PTSD or being physically incapacitated being sent a bus pass. Other complaints include late or no show rides. Another example of a client with a mental illness that is out of medication and needs to be seen by a provider before medication can be prescribed and that client’s ride does not show. Clients are being discharged by providers for too many missed or late appointments. The client voice needs to be heard.

Epilepsy Foundation, Middletown, CT; supports the bill. The issues of the non-emergency medical transportation are vitally important to the 36,000 people living with epilepsy in CT. People with uncontrolled seizures are not able to drive and depend on accessing rides from Veyo. Getting to medical appointments is critical to their care. This bill ensues all Medicaid beneficiaries are eligible for transportation, addresses wait times and creates a pathway towards civil injunction relief from Superior Court.

Suzi Craig, Senior Director of Policy, Mental Health CT; supports the bill. Missing medical appointments is the midst of the opioid epidemic is a matter of life and death. The disruption in transportation services impacts staff resources and other community providers through missed and rescheduled appointments. Corrective action plans have not made a significant difference.

Jeanne Milstein, Director of Human Services for the City of New London and co-chair of the Opioid Action Team; supports the bill. Data noted from June to November 2018 showed of 51 incidents; 72% reported the cab never came, 24% reported the cab came from 45 min to
3.5 hours late, and 48% reported missing a medical appointment. People missing medical appointments can mean life or death. Recommendations would be: to direct DSS to invoke any and all remedies for non-compliance under the contract; direct DSS to provide meaningful oversight of Veyo; conduct a perform audit as recommended by the Council on Medicaid Assistance Program Oversight (MAPOC).

Deb Polun, Senior Director for Policy & Outreach, Community Health Center Association of CT; supports the bill. NEMT has struggled to provide transportation services and stories of too early, too late, no pick-ups, inappropriate vehicles and lack of training of staff continue. The bill would create a statutory right for timely and appropriate transportation for members.

Shelley White, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Inc.; supports the bill. The bill would afford Medicaid members the right to reasonable wait times, the right to appropriate transportation and the right to seek civil injunctive relief.

Stan Soby, member of the Medical Assistance Program Oversight Council (MAPOC); supports the bill. The current contract is not sufficient to ensure transportation to the most vulnerable citizens; the bill is needed.

Michele Bissell, Director of Administrative Services of APT Foundation; supports the bill. Accessing transportation to medical appointments is vitally important for successful treatment. APT utilized one staff member to arrange rides for almost 2,500 clients and when rides problematic, staff purchase cab rides or bus passes. Difficulty navigating the Veyo phone system, receiving bus passes and transit cards, receiving the correct passes or cards, or receiving replacements or having rides arbitrarily cancelled are significant issues. Removing barriers to treatment is critical in providing effective mental health and addictions service treatment. Timely access to medication is critical.

Mag Morelli, President of LeadingAge CT; supports the bill. Older adults receiving care in this agency continue to be faced with long wait time at the call center and difficulty accessing transportation.

David Lowell, Chief Operation Officer, Hunter’s Ambulance Service, Inc.; supports the bill. The NEMT program remains fractured. Hunter’s Ambulance Service successfully managed the NEMT wheelchair service of 42 vans however; in January 2018 services changed dramatically when Veyo took over as the state’s NEMT. Mismanagement and lack of oversight of the transportation service, allowing out of state providers to displace CT providers have resulted in patients missing rides, being stranded at appointments and Hunter Ambulance having to lay off 20 employees from their wheelchair service. These issues should have not been allowed to create a NEMT crisis. DSS should have been more deliberate with corrective actions.

Jennifer Muggeo, MPH, Supervisor, Finance/Administration and Special Projects in Population Health; supports the bill. Testimony was provided on behalf of the Health Improvement Collaborative of Southeastern CT which includes representatives from healthcare, community organizations and residents. Members report late pick-ups (of more than an hour) or no shows resulting in missed appointments. Agencies resources are diverted to providing and advocating for transportation.
Marc Anthony Gallucci, Esq. Executive Director and Chief Advocate of Center for Disability Rights; supports the bill. The agency strongly supports action and reform of the NEMT. Under Veyo transportation has been an unmitigated disaster. Critical appointments are missed and live have been endangered. An example stated was a consumer stranded in the dark in 20 degree weather with no shelter. After repeated calls and after 2 hours the consumer was returned home. The consumer had been incontinent of bladder and bowel, became ill and was hospitalized. The suggestion is to have more than one transportation vendor so consumers can have choice.

Joe Luciano Sr., Seymour resident; supports the bill. Significant negative experiences regarding no shows, late shows, inappropriate vehicles, excessive phone time scheduling rides and excessive paperwork caused Mr. Luciano to pay $392 out of pocket to another transportation company last year.

Bonnie Roswig, Attorney with the Center for Children’s Advocacy; supports the bill. Veyo continues to violate the NEMT contract and the federal mandate and is in dire need of this legislation. Patients aren’t getting to dialysis and mental health appointments, inappropriate vehicles are sent for pick up and wait times can be hours. Providers are also affected with the no shows and late shows and report patients waiting for hours for pick-ups. Veyo appears to give preference to certain transportation company’s such as Uber and has consistently failed to provide timely payments to providers.

Drew Szarka, Danbury resident; supports the bill. Transportation with Veyo has been inconsistent and has interfered with personal needed appointments as well as affecting being able to care for a family member.

Orest Demkowycz, registered voter; supports the bill. Procedural inconsistencies resulted in waiting for a ride that never came. These inconsistencies with procedure during multiple phone calls and multiple employees at Veyo caused significant distress and anxiety.

Michael Dicantio, Danbury resident; supports the bill. It is difficult when standing outside in the cold or rain with a physical disability and having to wait for more than an hour for the ride service.

Sandra Maraboine, Norwalk resident & voter; supports the bill. Inconsistent rides and no shows have resulted in missed appointments and psychiatric medications not refilled due to the missed appointments.

Tyrone Bullock, Community Support Specialist, Keystone House, Inc.; supports the bill. It is critical for clients to have rides to attend medical appointments however clients wait for rides that never show up. This service is not reliable and cannot be used.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

No sources of opposition were submitted on this bill.

Reported by: Kayleigh Royston Date: 03/22/2019