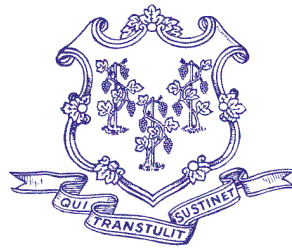


**SENATOR CHRISTINE COHEN**

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**State of Connecticut**  
**SENATE**

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE**

*Chair*

Environment Committee

*Vice Chair*

Commerce Committee

*Member*

Select Committee on Children  
Planning & Development Committee  
Public Health Committee

Dear Senator Lesser, Representative Wood, Senator Hwang, Representative Pavalock-D Amato and Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

I am proud to write IN SUPPORT of SB 842 An Act Concerning Health Insurance And Health Care In Connecticut. Health insurance should be reliable, predictable, and affordable. We want our medical treatment to be covered when we need care. We want to have the peace of mind that we will get care without surprises, changes, unexpected bills, or sudden rate increases. And we want this peace of mind to be within our reach financially, so no one has to run up thousands of dollars in medical expenses before their insurance kicks in. I fear that without action, people will continue to struggle to retain adequate health care needed to live. SB 842 addresses the gaps in the Affordable Care Act and offers a better alternative to the confusing, expensive and unreliable insurance in the market. I am confident that this plan will bring down costs and expand access to high-quality, affordable health care for individuals, families, small businesses and nonprofit employers.

As a small-business owner, I am very familiar with the unrelenting, constant rate hikes and worsening insurance coverage in our state. Years ago, my business provided 100% percent health insurance coverage for our employees; the steady climb of premiums, however, forced us to introduce cost-sharing first, and then shifted our employees to the state health exchange later, as our costs became unsustainable.

Our own family coverage has seen similar price increases, with premiums increasing by 50% in four short years and our family deductible nearly doubling. To give you a sense of what figures I am referring to, please see my monthly premiums and that year's corresponding deductible (the amount paid out of pocket prior to benefit coverage) for my family.

2016 \$1053.24 deductible \$8000  
2017 \$1,522.86 deductible \$12,000  
2018 \$1,583.59 deductible \$15,700  
2019\* \$1,720 deductible \$15,800

\*based on the renewal rates provided at the end of 2018

As you'll notice, our rates increased by over 50% in two years and our deductible nearly doubled. We would have needed to pay close to \$35,000 before physician services were to be covered.

It should be obvious by now that our health insurance system is neither reliable, nor predictable, and certainly not affordable. We have seen this in stark terms this year, as

tens of thousands of families in Connecticut were left without coverage, a consequence of layoffs during the coronavirus pandemic.

Families of color and low-income workers saw these impacts exacerbated. We see it every time someone says they're dreading going to the doctor because they haven't met their deductible and can't afford to pay for a visit out of pocket. We see it in the thousands of small businesses struggling to offer health care coverage, as costs mount and employee morale suffers.

In each case, we see how the inefficiencies, the gaps in coverage, and the staggering costs in our insurance system puts people's health at risk - a postponed visit to the doctor that fails to catch a deadly disease early on; a chronic illness that is not managed as it should, leading to complications; a simple medical procedure that could make us healthier or provide early diagnosis but is brushed aside due to its cost.

Even with all these additional risks, the financial burden remains and continues to magnify. We continue to see families having to sacrifice their life savings to cover a deductible when faced with medical emergencies. We continue to see small businesses struggling to stay afloat as health premiums swamp any productivity gains or pay raises. SB 842 will address these financial burdens by lowering the costs for small businesses and nonprofits by combining resources to build market share. And expand subsidies for the individuals seeking coverage on the open market, lowering premium out-of-pocket costs for middle-class Connecticut residents.

By creating a public option, Connecticut can provide a new baseline for health insurance coverage in our state. These plans, managed by the state but administered in partnership with private providers, will allow small companies and individuals to purchase health coverage in collaboration with the state employee plan. These larger risk pools will not only allow the negotiation of lower prices from providers, but offer lower premiums, larger networks, and better coverage.

Additionally, with a public option, small businesses will be able to stand with equal footing to big corporations in the insurance market. Gone would be the endless paperwork and meager offerings as insurance companies raise premiums. The public option will provide a clear, simple, reliable and affordable plan, backed by the state, that will have quality, affordable care as its first priority -- not squeezing profits out of small businesses trying to retain employees.

We have a tremendous opportunity to provide quality, affordable health care to Connecticut individuals, families, small businesses, nonprofits and unions by leveraging the negotiating power of the state employee plan. It is time to put the good health and well-being of Connecticut's residents first by prioritizing equitable health access. Health care should be a public good, not a market commodity. It is time to ensure that is the case here in Connecticut.

SB 842 will afford these groups multiple coverage options to choose from and will address the skyrocketing health care costs that impact everyone in the state. By doing so, we not only positively impact profit and loss statements, but we prevent a health crisis.

I want to thank the Committee for taking the time to give this bill thoughtful consideration. I believe we share a desire to see Connecticut thrive and its residents and businesses healthy and successful. We can realize this goal by moving legislation forward and provide the opportunity to purchase the same health insurance afforded to state and municipal employees. I hope you will join me in full support of SB 842.