



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

2139 Silas Deane Highway
Suite 205
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
(860) 257-8066

Shannon Perkins, LMSW, President
Stephen Wanczyk- Karp, LMSW, Executive Director
naswct@naswct.net

Testimony on SB 842: AAC Health Insurance and Health Care in Connecticut
Insurance and Real Estate Committee
February 9, 2021

Submitted By: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing over 2,300 members, NASW/CT is in **support of SB 842.**

Health care is a right, not a privilege, yet due to the continuing high costs for coverage far too many residents of Connecticut still cannot afford quality coverage at an affordable cost. This is particularly a problem for employees in small businesses where having an employer who offers comprehensive insurance coverage is unlikely, or for those who are solo or small group private practitioners running their own business. HB 842 will offer all small businesses and non-profits an affordable option for health insurance coverage by leveraging the negotiating power of the State of Connecticut.

For non-profits in the human services field there is a constant churning of employees who leave non-profits for public sector social service jobs, where salary is higher and health benefits are less expensive (and often more comprehensive). Non-profit social service providers have not had increases in state funding levels that has caused the migration of staff to the public sector. If non-profits can offer less expensive health insurance that is comprehensive in coverage it will create an incentive in keeping current staff. Both the non-profit organization and the clients they work with will be better served by consistency of staffing.

As an Association that represents social workers many of our members work in non-profits or have their own private practice. I hear from these social workers who contact us seeking to find out if NASW has health insurance coverage for members. Unfortunately, NASW cannot offer a national plan, so I can only suggest they see if they are eligible under the Municipal Employees Health Insurance Plan (MEHIP) or they can contact an independent insurance broker. Neither MEHIP or a broker is a satisfactory answer as the options through these avenues are limited and still unaffordable for decent coverage. It is ironic that a number of our members, who are health care providers, cannot afford high quality health coverage.

In the past couple of years rate increases in the small group market has increased by as much as double digits. This cost increase has led to an increase in the already troubling

trend of employers shifting costs to employees by increasing co-pays and deductibles, plus switching to plans with more restrictive coverage. Compare this to the state employee's value-based insurance design since 2011, where the state employee plan has seen small rate increases. Similar cost containment will be replicable under SB 842 for small businesses and non-profits.

SB 842 will increase the HUSKY A coverage for parents to 201% of the federal poverty level. The majority of HUSKY parents are unable to afford coverage, even with subsidized coverage under the Exchange, and it is **well documented that when the parents lose health insurance their children are much less likely to receive health care visits even when the child still is covered. So, lack of coverage to parents extends to the children.** We also know that individuals without health insurance will put off needed preventative care and early detection of serious health conditions, and when they become ill and finally seek care it is at a stage of far greater needs at far greater cost. Plus, the ability to care for one's children is diminished when the parent is dealing with one's own health problems. Bringing HUSKY A coverage to 201% of the FPL is critically important.

NASW/CT supports the provisions of SB 842 that would create a system similar to Access Health CT whereby undocumented immigrants may purchase health insurance. Currently, undocumented immigrants are prohibited from buying into Access Health CT, are not eligible for Medicaid or Medicare, and private insurance companies are either too expensive or outright reject applications from undocumented individuals. These are productive members of our state's society who are denied access to health coverage. Again, the lack of coverage is a significant barrier to preventative care and early detection of serious health conditions. When care is finally sought the costs are far greater as the problem is much exacerbated.

SB 842 offers subsidies to some people for purchase of health insurance on Access Health CT. These are individuals that Access Health CT was meant to help but does not at this time due to costs. SB 842 will also connect people applying for unemployment insurance to Access Health CT. For those who had health insurance through their employment the cost of keeping such coverage under COBRA is typically far too expensive. This section of the bill will assist person's recently unemployed with health care coverage options that may be more affordable.

By offering a public option HB 842 will not only offer affordable options for health coverage, it may also have a positive effect on the private insurance market. Under our economic system competition is commonly viewed as a way to increase innovation and reduce costs. Those in the private sector that profess to believe in our economic system should support a competitive marketplace. Clearly, consumers will benefit from expanded access to health coverage and greater choice of health insurance plans.

In the midst of a health care pandemic, now is the time to respond by passing SB 842!