



CONNECTICUT
LEGAL
RIGHTS
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 25, 2021

In support of SB 1056, AN ACT EXPANDING ACCESS TO MEDICAL ASSISTANCE, with suggested language changes

In support of HB 6637, AN ACT CONCERNING STATE-WIDE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR DEAF, DEAF-BLIND AND HARD OF HEARING PERSONS.

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Berthel, Representative Case and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

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Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order that mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community.

CLRP strongly supports **SB 1056**, which would raise the current income limits for adults across all three of the main Medicaid programs (HUSKY A, HUSKY C and HUSKY D). The impact of COVID-19 has demonstrated how necessary it is for all people to have access to comprehensive, affordable insurance. The solution proposed in this bill may also help the state address racial disparities in health by providing insurance to people who are Black and brown who work at essential jobs which do not provide health benefits, make too much income to qualify for

Medicaid under current income limits, yet not enough to afford to purchase insurance on the exchange.

I urge the committee to pay special attention to the testimony of my colleagues at legal services whose expertise in Medicaid law far exceeds mine. CLRP does not provide representation to clients in Medicaid eligibility cases; we refer them to the other programs (Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, and New Haven Legal Assistance Association.) Their testimony includes suggested changes for revision to the bill, and I urge the committee to follow their recommendations.

For the record, CLRP has previously submitted testimony to the committee demonstrating our support for SB 956, which would extend full HUSKY coverage to all individuals regardless of immigration status. If SB 956 is passed, it will apply as well to the income expansions provided in SB 1056.

There is no question that SB 1056 carries a significant price tag; however, we know that what this state spends money on is a reflection of its values. This bill represents a proposal to increase fairness and justice in access to health care. It should be funded as part of an overall state budget that is more equitable for lower-income residents of our state. That is why we support reasonable progressive revenue proposals to fund this and other essential safety net programs, such as set forth in SB 821 and HB 6187.

I thank the Committee for raising **HB 6637** and urge you to pass the bill. People who are seeking mental health treatment deserve culturally and linguistically accessible mental health care no matter what age they are. People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf-Blind should have access to mental health care that meets all of their needs. The disability community has a saying “nothing about us without us” and I encourage you to pay especially close attention to the testimony submitted by people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf-Blind, because their lived experience should inform your decisions, and by my colleague from Mental Health Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on these two important bills.