

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1056

Title: AN ACT EXPANDING ACCESS TO MEDICAL ASSISTANCE.

Vote Date: 4/1/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/25/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill proposes to raise the income limits for several categories of Medicaid coverage in Connecticut's Medicaid program. It would raise the eligibility for most categories of Medicaid eligibility to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). The bill also includes a provision to provide medical assistance to individuals under the age of 65 who do not otherwise qualify for medical assistance but whose income is between 133% and 200% of FPL. The substitute language adds income disregards for HUSKY C from 100% of the FPL to 200% of the FPL, in conformance with federal law. This bill seeks to provide expanded access to comprehensive, affordable healthcare coverage to improve the quality of life for Connecticut residents.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Deidre Gifford, Commissioner, Department of Social Services explains that the proposed changes in this bill would greatly increase eligibility. Currently, the income eligibility for HUSKY C is up to 143% of the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) payment standard, which varies based on geographical region. Commissioner Gifford comments that "federal law only allows coverage of the 'aged, blind and disabled' category up to 100% of the FPL," but they may qualify for Medicaid through a home and community-based services waiver or a "spend-down" of their income. She also notes that if Connecticut were to expand HUSKY D coverage beyond 133% of the FPL, it would not receive the enhanced federal medical assistance (FMAP) for the population between 134% and 200% of the FPL. Since these proposed eligibility increases would significantly increase enrollment and expenditures, and there is no allocation in the Governor's budget for these costs, the Department opposes this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator Martin Looney, President Pro-Tempore supports this bill because it expands coverage to uninsured individuals who have incomes just above the current Medicaid threshold. Individuals with incomes between 100% and 200% of the FPL make up “13% of Connecticut’s population, but 26% of the state’s uninsured residents.” Sen. Looney notes that the bill would prevent a benefits cliff that will be created by the scheduled minimum wage increases. He believes that the state should create a gradual decrease in benefits for individuals whose incomes rise above the allowable limits for benefits.

Sheldon Toubman, Attorney, New Haven Legal Assistance Association
Alison Weir, Policy Advocate and Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Luis Perez, President and CEO, Mental Health Connecticut (MHC)

They support this bill because the pandemic has shown that access to comprehensive, affordable insurance is necessary. They all recommend increasing the income level for individuals over 65 because their needs are the same as those who are under 65 years old. Mr. Toubman and Ms. Perez note that some elderly and disabled individuals with incomes over 200% FPL will still have large medical bills which could be used to qualify for Medicaid under spend-down. Since Connecticut is a “209b state” they state that it is required under federal Medicaid law that spending down continue to be allowed for this population. Mr. Toubman and Ms. Weir explain that the best route to achieve 200% of the FPL for this population would be to raise the income disregard.

Ellen Andrews, Executive Director, CT Health Policy Project
Marijane Carey, Maternal and Child Health Consultant, CT Maternal and Child Health Coalition (MCH) and Every Woman CT (EWCT)
Rosana G. Ferraro, Universal Health Care Foundation of CT
Sandra Olsen
Maura Sheil-Hughes

They strongly support this bill because restoring HUSKY coverage for working parents and expanding it for adults in all categories, benefits families, communities, and the state budget. They emphasize that this bill would restore HUSKY A parent eligibility to 200% of the FPL. This restoration of eligibility would include over 11,200 parents who lost access to coverage in 2015. Ensuring coverage for these parents would greatly improve the health and safety of families across the state. This restoration is needed because although AccessHealthCT is a lifeline for thousands of CT residents, it is not affordable for many working families.

Kenneth Barela, Chief Executive Officer, Hispanic Health Council (HHC),
Katia Daley, Healthcare Campaign Organizer, CT Students for a Dream
Kathleen Flaherty, Executive Director, CT Legal Rights Project
Gretchen Raffa, Senior Director, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
Karen Siegel, Director of Policy, Health Equity Solutions

They support this bill because it addresses the inequities in accessing health insurance experienced by low-income communities, primarily immigrants and communities of color. Ms. Daley notes that this bill will expand the accessibility to affordable healthcare to more mixed-

status immigrant families. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has illuminated the systematic inequities that these communities face, they believe Connecticut has a responsibility to ensure these communities have health coverage. When individuals lack coverage or are under-insured, they avoid or delay seeking care. This leads to increased illness, complications, and mortality, which results in higher costs for the state.

Sylvia Cooper, Ministerial Health Fellowship Advocacy Coalition

Monica Dawkins

Christian Kallfelz

Maura Sheil-Hughes

Katherine Villeda

They all believe that healthcare is a human right and increasing access to medical assistance is vital for achieving health equity. All testifiers speak to the critically important value of having HUSKY available to access lifesaving care. They urge the passage of this bill so that more Connecticut residents have health insurance they can afford to use. They emphasize the importance of preventative care, and how it inhibits conditions from being undetected and exacerbated. A few testifiers note that increasing eligibility for HUKSY programs is vital as the minimum wage continues to increase.

Rosana G. Ferraro, Universal Health Care Foundation of CT

Gretchen Raffa, Senior Director, Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

Maggie Goodwin, National Organization for Women

They support this bill because increasing the number of CT residents with affordable health insurance brings the state closer to universal coverage. This bill is critical to provide coverage for individuals who cannot afford private insurance, despite their eligibility for financial help on the state exchange. It is extremely challenging for individuals living under 201% of the Federal Poverty Line to afford the cost-sharing elements that come with private insurance. All testifiers request that low-income elderly people be included in this expansion because they struggle to afford care and services that Medicare does not cover. They also request including all immigrants regardless of status; the uninsured rate for the undocumented population is 52% in our state.

Ms. Goodwin also adds that many women who recently received a raise due to increased minimum wage income will be priced out of Medicaid coverage and unable to afford coverage through AccessHealthCT.

The Connecticut Agencies on Aging

Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, Executive Director, The National Association of Social Workers (NASW/CT)

Susan Salters

They support this bill because the current income limitations, specifically for HUSKY C, are too low. The CT Agencies on Aging state that they “leave individuals living in poverty by federal standards without access to basic health care expense relief.” In most parts of the state, the income limits for this program are at 82% of the FPL. This leaves many seniors with the decision of paying for health care expenses or other basic necessities. The CT Agencies on Aging note that spend-down rules are complex and very difficult for an elder to navigate,

sometimes leading to premature institutional placement. NASW/CT recommends an amendment to include all elderly persons who are income-eligible because Medicare does not cover certain services that HUSKY offers.

Mr. Wanczyk-Karp notes that aligning income eligibility for HUSKY A, B, C will eliminate the current confusion amongst applicants. He also added that more coverage through HUSKY results in less uncompensated care, more preventative care, expansion of coverage in Black and Latino communities, and maximization of federal matching funds.

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, Executive Director, CT Oral Health Initiative notes that lack of coverage and high cost of care are the primary reasons people forgo seeking healthcare. Expanding access to HUSKY would provide people with comprehensive coverage without co-payments. This will encourage people to seek preventative care, which will result in improved health outcomes and major cost savings for the state. Ms. Goodwin notes that “dental coverage in Medicaid helps adults obtain and maintain employment and reduces costly emergency room visits.”

Thomas Stovall, MPH Candidate supports this bill because it is a step towards lowering the number of uninsured people in Connecticut. Mr. Stovall notes that the highest percentage of uninsured people in our state lies within the 100-199% FPL range. He states that “Connecticut has one of the most consolidated individual insurance markets.” This lack of competition contributes to the lack of affordable insurance available to this population.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

There were none expressed.

Reported by: Gianna Vollano

Date: April 16, 2021