

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5040

AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Title: FOR HUMAN SERVICES.

Vote Date: 3/8/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/1/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Committee Bill No. 5040 broadens the Department of Public Health's Student Loan Repayment Program to require distributors to provide or facilitate access to behavioral health services while also expanding the types of primary care clinicians that may be recruited through the program to include psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, licensed marriage and family therapists, and licensed professional counselors. This bill would transfer the community health worker grant program established in last year's budget implementer from the Department of Public Health to the Department of Social Services.

This legislation also reserves the general requirement that DSS will provide temporary relief to nursing homes within \$10 million in ARPA funds. However, the bill eliminates specific requirements that DSS could allocate grants based on the per cent difference between the issued and calculated nursing home reimbursement rate and hold the capacity to issue one-time grants subject to proportional adjustments based on available funding. Furthermore, this legislation keeps the requirement that DSS can increase the minimum per diem, per bed rate for ICF-IDs to \$501 for FYs 22 and 23. The bill specifies that the increase is for the purposes of providing pandemic-related support.

Lastly, Committee Bill No. 5040 eliminates the requirement that DSS provides TFA colas or prorated benefit increases when funds lapse.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Proposed Substitute Bill No. 5040 removes Section 6 provision eliminating requirement that lapsed funds be used to provide a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for TANF recipients.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Commissioner Deidre S. Gifford, Department of Social Services:

Commissioner Deidre S. Gifford and the Department of Social Services (DSS) are in support of Committee Bill No. 5040. The testimony expresses that DSS has existing contracts with the state's network of community action agencies (CAAs) across multiple programs and is better positioned to develop and administer the community health worker grant program. Commissioner Gifford mentioned that this legislation will also allow for the full investment of funds, as originally envisioned by the legislature, by shifting the cap on the amount of funds that can be issued to each of the state's nine CAAs to a cap on the amount of funds issued per community health worker. She proposed that a maximum of \$30,000 could be issued annually to each CAA without this change, leaving a significant portion of the original funds (\$2.7 million in FY 2022 and FY 2023) unspent. Additionally, the Commissioner added that there is no financial impact resulting from this change as this reflects a transfer of an existing allocation of CSFRF funding from DPH to DSS. In reference to Section 6 of this bill, DSS recommends that if the legislative intent is to preserve COLA adjustments, then section 17b-104 should not be modified to remove the COLA for the year in question.

Commissioner Manisha Juthani, Department of Public Health:

Commissioner Manisha Juthani and the Department of Public Health (DPH) are in support of Committee Bill No. 5040. As stated in the written testimony, the Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) within this legislation will support primary care providers working in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) to meet health care workforce needs within Connecticut. Additionally stated, the SLRP will assist in meeting the following long-term goals which are increased access to primary care services and behavioral health care services, decreased health care disparities, and improved overall health outcomes in HPSA communities. The Department is in support of broadening SLRP direct service programs to be inclusive of behavioral health services as it expands eligibility through redefining "primary care clinicians" in this legislation.

Jeffrey Beckham, Acting Secretary, Office of Policy and Management:

Jeffrey Beckham, the Acting Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, is in support of Committee Bill No. 5040. Mr. Beckham supports Section 1 of this legislation, as the SLRP promotes the recruitment and retention of health care professionals. The testimony states that by alleviating the burden of student loan debt, the program will encourage students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue careers in the health care sector and work in underserved communities. Additionally, as stated in the testimony, Sections 2 and 3 will allow the full expenditure of the funding allocated for the Community Health Worker Grant Program in the adopted budget. Furthermore, Section 4 updates language to provide broader levels of nursing home facility support and Section 5 clarifies that establishment of a minimum rate of \$501 for Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) is tied to the pandemic and shifts funding to CSFRF. Lastly, Section 6 strikes unnecessary and potentially conflicting language in statute governing DSS' Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program.

Victoria Veltri, Executive Director, Office of Health Strategy:

Victoria Veltri, the Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy, is in support of Committee Bill No. 5040. As stated in the testimony, Connecticut primary care organizations have been reporting staff shortages and enormous difficulty in recruitment. This legislation will incentivize and promote the recruitment and retention of these crucial providers by reinstating the Department of Public Health's Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP). Additionally, OHS is in support of this bill as it seeks to include behavioral health practitioners are eligible providers. Furthermore, OHS is specifically in favor of Sections 2 and 3 of this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Deb Polun, Executive Director Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA):

Deb Polun, the Executive Director Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA), is in support of Committee Bill No. 5040. As stated in the testimony, CAFCA is a state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federally designated anti-poverty agencies serving nearly 200,000 low-and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the Connecticut. As stated, CAFCA is specifically in favor of Sections 2 and 3 that provides a fix for a Community Health Worker program the legislature created last year in Public Act 21-2, June Special Session.

Mag Morelli, President, LeadingAge Connecticut:

Mag Morelli, the President of LeadingAge is in support of Committee Bill No. 5040. Specifically, LeadingAge is in support of Section 4 of this legislation. As stated in the testimony, the rebasing of the rates will require an additional investment of state and federal dollars over the three-year phase in of the new acuity-based rate system. The Governor has included \$12.8 million in the DSS budget adjustment proposal to support the first year of the rebasing, which LeadingAge Connecticut strongly supports.

Justine Randall, Co-Chair, Public Policy and Outreach Committee, Connecticut Association for Behavior Analysis (CTABA):

Justine Randall, Co-Chair of the Public Policy and Outreach Committee with the Connecticut Association for Behavior Analysis (CTABA) is in support of Committee Bill No. 5040 with recommendations. As stated in the testimony, CTABA supports this legislation as it looks to expand and fund the Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP). However, CTABA mentions that Behavior Analysts are an important and growing field within behavioral health services and are excluded from language in the bill. CTABA recommends adding behavior analysts as a profession that can benefit from this program.

Tracy Wodatch, President and CEO, The Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home:

Tracy Wodatch, President and CEO The Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home, offers support of Committee Bill No. 5040 with recommendations. As stated in the testimony, The Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home specific recommendations are as follow:

- Consistent annual provider rate increases to account for COLA and inflation;
- A 10.5% increase in the Behavioral Health Medication Administration rate;
- A 27.2% increase in the Adult Complex Care rate to align with the 31.7% increase for Pediatric Complex Care;
- Re-instate the Add-on rates taken away in 2017;
- Develop a Home Health Social Work rate to address and support the Social Determinants of Health.

Karen Siegel, Director of Policy, Health Equity Solutions (HES):

Karen Siegel, the Director of Policy with Health Equity Solutions (HES), offers support of Committee Bill No. 5040. As stated in the testimony, HES strongly supports the adjustments to HUSKY adult dental and endodontic provider rates, efforts to improve access to behavioral health and family planning services, and efforts to address the autism waiver waitlist. HES emphasizes that the legislature should ensure that access to affordable health care reaches Connecticut's Black, Latino/a, Indigenous, and other people of color. Overall, HES supports the technical fixes to the community health worker program created in the 2021 budget implementer. HES also supports the recommendations submitted by the Greater Hartford Legal Aid, to ensure cost of living increases and streamline eligibility determinations for TANF and improve eligibility calculations for HUSKY C.

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, Executive Director, Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI):

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), offers strong support for Committee Bill No. 5040. As stated in the testimony, COHI is in support of the proposed 25% increase in adult dental reimbursement rates and the additional increase in the endodontic rates for adults. Additionally, COHI recommends a larger increase that matches adult rates to the child reimbursement rates for all procedures because, as stated in the testimony, larger increases have a larger impact on provider participation. COHI expresses that for most dental services in Connecticut, the reimbursement for adult patients is 53% of the reimbursement for pediatric patients. Therefore, this payment structure frustrates providers and encourages them to refuse or deprioritize adult patients on Medicaid.

16 other individuals submitted testimony in favor of Committee Bill No. 5040

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Alison Weir, Policy Advocate and Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid:

Alison Weir, a Policy Advocate and Attorney for the Greater Hartford Legal Aid, offers strong opposition on Committee Bill No. 5040. Ms. Weir believes in some of the intent of this legislation such as increasing dental reimbursement rates for adult HUSKY enrollees, increase funding for behavioral health services for children and adults, and providing funding for community health workers. However, she offers recommendations and other points of opposition. In the written testimony, Ms. Weir states that there is no medical reason why adult dental reimbursement rates should not be the same as the child dental reimbursement rates. Dental health is an integral aspect of overall health. Additionally, Ms. Weir states that the governor's budget cuts \$5.5 million from TFA and \$2.3 million from SAGA, the only cash assistance programs in the state. She is against cutting any funding from the cash assistance programs as they directly provide people with very low incomes what they most need. A recommendation within the written testimony is to consider reframing the eligibility standard and payment standard for the Temporary Family Assistance to one based on the federal poverty level.

Reported by: Kass Fruin

Date: 3/15/2022