

# Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6665

AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

**Title:** FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES.

**Vote Date:** 3/28/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

**PH Date:** 2/28/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Human Services Committee  
Governor Ned Lamont

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

The Governor's proposed budget for Human Services intends to build economic growth and opportunities for families across Connecticut, particularly while Health and Human Services are still in high demand since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Expanding the State Administered General Assistance (SAGA) and Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) programs will allow households to not be financially burdened by bills and other household expenses given the increases in the costs of goods and services. Moreover, increasing the reimbursement rates for residential care homes will prevent further closures and keep the continuum of care. As an effort to decrease the number of uninsured individuals in the state and prevent disruptions in healthcare coverage, allowing the Department of Revenue Services to release tax information to Access Health CT will maximize targeted outreach efforts by providing enrollment information.

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language in this bill removes provisions having OPM take over as the lead agency for autism services. It requires two automatic six-month extensions of TANF if federally permissible (effective April 1, 2024) and an option for a family to petition for an additional yearlong extension. It removes requirements eliminating annual TANF benefit COLA using lapsed funds. Additionally, it removes provisions freezing rates and prohibiting inflationary increases for residential care homes, intermediate care facilities, community living arrangements, regional education service centers, and nursing homes (retains fair rent,

capital improvement rate increases if funds appropriated). It retains aspects increasing TANF, SAGA asset limits, etc.

#### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Department of Development Services (DDS), Commissioner, Jordan Scheff;** supports this bill stating moving the policymaking and management of services for persons with autism to OPM will allow increased access to services. It is stated that consolidating and having OPM be the lead agency will allow an increase in funding as OPM will be able to apply for federal funding and grants.

**Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner, Andrea Baton Reeves;** supports this bill stating it would result in net savings of \$34.4 million in FY 2024 and \$58.4 million in FY 2025. It is stated the Governor's budget will provide DSS with the funding to implement the changes proposed ranging from the Temporary Family Assistance program, the State Administered General Assistance program, coordinating autism services, to overseeing the operation of the state's Medicaid program.

**Office of Policy and Management (OPM), Secretary, Jeffrey R. Beckham;** supports this bill stating it will advance the Governor's goals in building social services programs to be self-sufficient, promote affordability, provide increased care in community-based settings, and advance overall equity. It is stated letting OPM be the lead agency to coordinate autism services will allow them to determine gaps and work on improving coordination amongst multiple state agencies moving forward.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Connecticut Association of Health Plans, Executive Director, Susan Halpin;** supports this bill stating CoveredCT is a vital program as it provides commercial benefits under the Health Insurance Exchange that is covered by the state. It is suggested that the state should auto-enroll newly ineligible Medicaid beneficiaries into the CoveredCT program through financial information provided by the Department of Revenue Services, similar to the re-enrollment process for Medicaid.

**Health Equity Solutions, Interim Executive Director, Ayesha R. Clarke;** supports this bill stating that allowing Connecticut residents to share their information with AccessHealthCT when filing state taxes will help individuals when selecting and understanding health insurance options.

**LeadingAge Connecticut, President, Mag Morelli;** supports this bill stating the provisions to increase reimbursement rates for residential care homes will provide much-needed assistance for the continuation of services and support for older and disabled individuals. It is suggested that freezing the statutory inflationary factors for nursing homes can have adverse effects as rates should keep up with the current costs of care.

**The following individuals have submitted testimony in support of this bill.** It is stated consistent funding will help with labor, business, and maintenance costs at his residential care facility. It is stated that rebasing of residential care homes has not occurred in almost ten years and that an increase in funding would allow competitive wages.

Connecticut Association of Resident Care Homes. President, Tina Yeitz  
Essex Village Manor, Administrator, Kal Patel  
High Chase Residential Care Home, Owner & Administrator, Dr. Kuldip S Bhogal  
Sheltering Arms, Vice President of Eldercare Services, Carolyn Trantalis

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Connecticut AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorne;** opposes this bill stating the removal of rate increases for residential care homes will affect the state's most vulnerable citizens. It is stated that it is time to reinvest in these services at a time when the state's economic situation has been enhanced.

**Connecticut Association of Health Care Facilities / Connecticut Center for Assisted Living (CAHCF/CCAL), President and CEO, Matt Barrett;** opposes this bill stating that eliminating inflationary increases to Medicaid skilled nursing facilities rates will result in a \$205.9 million reduction to nursing homes. It is stated the inflationary increase is vital given the rise in the cost of staffing and agency costs.

**Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance; Director of Government Relations, Ben Shaiken;** opposes certain provisions of this bill stating freezing inflationary rate increases will hurt nonprofits. It is stated the COVID-19 pandemic has led to workforce shortages and an increase in services despite higher costs.

**One person has submitted testimony in opposition to this bill.**

**Reported by: Chandra Persaud**

**Date: April 4, 2023**