

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6857

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FOOD AS

Title: MEDICINE WORKING GROUP.

Vote Date: 3/28/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/7/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.

Rep. Lucy Dathan, 142nd Dist.

Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.

Rep. Jaime S. Foster, 57th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Poor diets greatly affect Connecticut's most economically challenged communities due to a lack of healthy and affordable food options. Not having access to healthy food choices can result in health inequities and are a major factor in chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, or high blood pressure. Allowing the opportunity to have medically tailored meals and produce prescriptions can remove barriers surrounding healthy eating. Having food as medicine as a preventive measure will address ongoing health conditions and provide meaningful solutions. This bill creates a pilot program to provide Medicaid funding for produce prescriptions for Medicaid enrollees with certain health conditions and the development of a working group to provide additional recommendations, including for providing medically tailored meals for such persons.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language removes Section 3 of the bill requiring Medicaid reimbursement for certified dietitian-nutritionists.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner, Andrea Barton Reeves; opposes this bill stating the pilot program to provide Medicaid coverage for produce perspectives has good intent, however, this would result in additional costs that are not included in the Governor's budget. It is stated the formation of a working group is not the best way for DSS to communicate and collaborate with agencies and stakeholders and suggests that they meet on an as-needed basis. It is also stated that expanding funding for Medicaid reimbursement rates for registered dietitian-nutritionists is not included in the Governor's budget (*This was removed in the substitute language*).

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO); supports this bill stating having access to quality foods can improve health outcomes for individuals with certain health conditions. It is suggested that CWCSEO be added to the working group and that the working group should be a standing committee that includes local food producers. It is also suggested that the state should sponsor annual conferences to determine best new practices and food distribution models.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Jaime Foster; supports this bill stating a working group was formed last summer where experts, advocates, state agency members, and legislators met to discuss the importance of addressing nutrition-related chronic diseases. It is stated that low-income populations are at risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases and the components of this bill will improve the health and wellness of the Medicaid population.

CT Rare Action Network, State Ambassador, Lesley Bennett; supports this bill stating that prescribed foods can be seen as medical therapy. It is suggested that rare diseases should be included in this bill as nutritious foods can be beneficial for individuals with rare diseases.

Unite Us, Senior Policy Manager for the Northeast, Max Perkins; supports this bill stating that healthy communities are formed by improving individuals' and families' health and quality of life. It is stated the Food as Medicine program will be a beneficial strategy for accomplishing this.

The following individuals submitted testimony in support of this bill. It is stated that consuming an unhealthy diet often tends to contribute to the onset of chronic diseases. It is stated that having medically tailored meals and produce prescriptions can improve and support a higher quality of life while empowering patients to have a role in disease treatment and management. It is stated the establishment of a permanent Food as Medicine Working Group will allow the state to take a solution-oriented approach to the prevention and treatment of nutrition-related chronic disease.

American Heart Association, Government Relations Director, Jim Williams
Connecticut Academy of Nutrition Dietetics, State Policy Representative, Allison Kallberg
Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Primary Care Pediatrician, Nancy Trout
Connecticut Hospital Association
Instacart, Deputy Policy Manager East Cost, Robin Sommer

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None stated.

Reported by: Maureen O'Reilly

Date: March 31, 2023