

# Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-977

AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FOR SURGERY AND

**Title:** MEDICAL SERVICES RELATED TO TREATMENT OF OBESITY.

**Vote Date:** 3/2/2023

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

**PH Date:** 2/14/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Human Services Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Obesity continues to impact more people in Connecticut. Having access to medical assistance for surgery and medical services related to the treatment of obesity shouldn't be based on income. This bill would require the CT Department of Social Services to provide Medicaid and HUSKY B beneficiaries with bariatric surgery, prescription drug treatment, and nutritional counseling to treat severe obesity.

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language clarifies "medical services" to be covered for the treatment of obesity including prescription drugs approved by the FDA for the treatment of obesity and nutritional counseling for persons with obesity by a certified dietitian-nutritionist

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

**Department of Social Services (DSS), William Gui Woolston, Director of Medicaid & Division of Health Services;** opposes this bill as there are unanticipated costs not included in the budget. It is stated that current department regulations and policy authorize regulations for "surgical services necessary to treat morbid obesity as defined by the International Classification of Disease (ICD) that cause or aggravate another medical illness..." It is stated that individuals with severe obesity have one or more complicating health conditions and DSS is required to reimburse for surgical and medical services in those circumstances.

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

**American Diabetes Association, Director of State Government Affairs & Advocacy, Monica Billger;** supports this bill as this will help the prevention of diabetes and improve the lives of those affected by diabetes. It is stated that the percentage of adults with obesity has increased in Connecticut over time and disproportionately impacts ethnically and racially diverse individuals. It is stated that obesity prevention can reduce the progression of prediabetes to type 2 diabetes.

**Connecticut Bioscience Growth Council, Senior Counsel & Executive Director, Paul Pescatello;** supports this bill as these treatments would allow individuals to increase productivity within the workforce and will no longer be classified as disabled. It is stated that providing services related to the treatment of obesity will improve access to safe and effective prescription drug medication. It is stated that it will also reduce long-term healthcare costs for the state.

**Connecticut Children's, Surgeon-in-Chief, Christine Finck, MD;** supports this bill as obesity is an epidemic and chronic disease and has seen the impact obesity has on children on a daily basis. It is stated that no child should be withheld from life-saving treatments due to misconceptions and social prejudice against obesity. It is stated obesity has the potential to be cured through methods like surgery, medicine, and other forms of medical interventions.

**Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Executive Director, Kathleen Flaherty;** supports this bill as significant weight gain can be caused by the adverse consequences of psychiatric medication.

**Norwalk Hospital, Director of Bariatric Surgery & Head of Surgery, Neil Floch, MD;** supports this bill as this would be an investment into the extension of life and will improve the quality of life for Connecticut residents. It is stated that this bill would increase access to obesity care, especially in underserved populations.

**Obesity Action Coalition, Federal & State Affairs Consultant, Christopher Gallagher;** supports this bill as treatments for people with obesity will mitigate the impact and improve health outcomes.

**Southwest Community Health Center, Chief of Pediatrics, Howard Smith;** supports this bill as this will be life-changing for patients who are seeking treatments related to obesity. It is stated that the patients they are treating in their clinics are disproportionately affected by obesity-related diseases.

**Stamford Health, President & CEO, Kathleen Silard;** supports this bill as this would provide tools for patients to have healthier lives and have access to services that would allow them to maintain a healthy weight. It is stated that Medicaid beneficiaries should not be kept from these treatments and services.

**Yale School of Medicine, Instructor of Medicine, Nathan Wood;** supports this bill as patients who have Medicaid are currently unable to get access to prescription drug medication. It is stated that treating obesity will prevent many health conditions.

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

None stated.

**Reported by: Chandra Persaud**

**Date: March 8, 2023**