

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-991

AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT FOR COMMUNITY

Title: HEALTH WORKERS.

Vote Date: 3/21/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/21/2023

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

CO-SPONSOR OF BILL:

Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Some Medicaid recipients struggle to navigate the healthcare system if they have language, cultural, or technological barriers. These individuals may lose out on services they need or are not receiving critical care for chronic illness due to a lack of understanding. Community health workers (CHWs) are individuals who come from the same community, speak their language, and are trusted by the community. CHWs also provide health promotion and education, patient outreach and follow-up, assistance in navigating the health care system, translation and interpretation services, care coordination, and case management. However, these community health workers rely on grants to keep them working within the community providing much-needed support. This bill will provide Medicaid reimbursement to community health workers to be able to continue to provide essential services within the community they serve.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language in this bill requires DSS to establish a reimbursement system for community health workers that encourages the growth of such workers but disincentivizes other providers from limiting their services.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner, Andrea Barton-Reeves; opposes this bill stating the proposed language is broad and does not set any parameters or definitions on the scope of coverage. It is stated that while CHWs are capable of effectively providing a diverse range of services, there may be certain services that are not deemed appropriate for provision under a Medicaid program. It is also stated the Governor's budget does not include funding to provide a Medicaid reimbursement for CHWs.

Office of Child Advocate, Child Advocate, Sarah Eagan; supports this bill stating reimbursement for community health workers are a low-cost investment to promote health equity, connect underserved children and families to support services, and help engage families. It is stated a recent CDC report found that over the last 10 years, most youth risk indicators have worsened, and the CDC recommends a system-wide commitment to strengthening protective factors for children and families such as support and services. It is stated reimbursing community health workers is an important effort to ensure that the state is funding layers of workforce and family support.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

City of New Haven, Director of Health, Maritza Bond; supports this bill stating CHWs build trust with residents and are an intermediary between public health agencies and the communities served. It is stated CHWs provide culturally appropriate information in an accessible way that traditional governmental agencies are unable to do. It is also stated CHWs are typically from the communities they serve, which allows them to have better connections with residents.

City of New London, Director of Human Services, Jeanne Milstein; supports this bill stating New London was hit hard by the overdose crisis and started an initiative called NL CARES where they hired CHWs who have expertise in substance use disorder to address the overdose crisis. It is stated that community health workers have developed trust with individuals within the community. It is stated that providing reimbursements to CHWs will allow providers to partner with them and determine ways to address inequities and promote health for Medicaid beneficiaries.

Access Community Action Agency, Senior Director Community Engagement, Kathleen Krider; supports this bill stating Medicaid reimbursements for CHWs would be the next best step once the contract between DSS and the CT Association for Community Action to pay CHWs ends.

The Arc of Connecticut, Director of Advocacy, Carol Scully; supports this bill stating CHWs should be reimbursed for the cost of care under Medicaid. It is suggested that CHWs be able to provide care under the DSS/DDS Medicaid waivers that offer services for persons with disabilities.

Black and Brown United in Action; supports this bill stating there is a shortage of healthcare workers and the role of CHWs meets the needs of the communities in which they serve. It is stated CHWs serve as a point of contact for individuals who do not have access to quality medical care or social services due to poverty, language barriers, or cultural differences.

Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Associate Director, Liz Dupont-Diehl; supports this bill stating community health workers are helpful when providing information and resources related to health, however, it is difficult to fund these positions as they rely on grants. It is stated providing Medicaid reimbursements will allow CHWs to provide services that will be essential to beneficiaries and will result in overall improvements in health.

Connecticut Association for Community Action, Executive Director, Deb Polun; supports this bill stating CHWs tend to be funded by time-restrictive grants. It is stated the current funding methods are not sustainable and don't allow for the growth of a service that improves many people's lives. It is stated having Medicaid reimbursement would allow the continuation of services that will address people's health-related social needs and improve their overall health.

Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, Chair, Doris Maldonado Mendez; supports this bill stating CHWs help meet the needs of individuals who want to stay at home rather than in an institutional setting. It is stated CHWs help address an individual's concerns and issues and with the state's current shortage of healthcare workers, Medicaid reimbursement for CHWs would be a great opportunity to address the workforce issue.

Connecticut Hospital Association; supports this bill stating when CHWs are employed by hospitals, they provide health education, support participation in follow-up care, and direct access to essential community support. It is also stated CHWs may also help hospitals improve healthcare quality and strengthen relationships and trust within the communities for which they provide care.

Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Executive Director, Kathleen Flaherty; supports this bill stating CHWs are necessary when supporting the communities in which they serve. It is stated that due to the lack of funding, there aren't many CHWs throughout the state. It is stated having Medicaid reimbursement will create a maintainable funding stream for CHWs services.

Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Executive Director, T.J. Clarke II; supports this bill stating the role of community health workers play a key role in advancing equity in Connecticut. It is stated a Medicaid reimbursement will decrease systematic health inequities that many residents in communities face daily.

Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition, Allison Logan; supports this bill stating Community Health Workers help underserved people access care and improve health outcomes. It is stated CHWs play a major role in addressing social and economic needs and working towards eliminating health inequities.

GHIAA, Physician, Avrum Blitzer; supports this bill stating CHWs can bridge gaps in healthcare access and screening prevention of diseases like cancer, hypertension, and diabetes.

Health Equity Solutions, Interim Executive Director, Ayesha Clarke; supports this bill stating the need for CHWs has never been more urgent as the health and social systems are

becoming more complex. It is stated inequities remain a significant and consistent concern throughout the state and CHWs provide effective, affordable solutions.

Khmer Health Advocate, Executive Director, Theanvy Kuoch; supports this bill stating the importance of community health workers and the language barriers some 4,000 individuals face in Connecticut when trying to speak about health concerns or how to prevent chronic illnesses. It is stated that CHWs have the communication skills to assist individuals when trying to communicate with their healthcare providers.

Ledge Light Health District, Deputy Director, Jennifer Muggeo; supports this bill stating CHWs play a crucial role in providing community members with information, resources, and services. It is suggested that Medicaid reimbursements for Community Health Workers should include local health departments and community-based organizations.

March of Dimes, Director, Maternal Infant Health Initiatives, Alison Tyliczszak; supports this bill stating CHWs are public health outreach professionals with an in-depth understanding of the experiences, languages, cultures, and socioeconomic needs of the community they serve. It is stated CHWs are trusted amongst communities and understand a community's needs based on their own lived experience which helps in the effort to reduce health disparities, improve health outcomes, and better the overall quality of care.

Medicare For All CT, Board Member, Timothy Gabriele; supports this bill stating CHWs provide services that help individuals navigate the healthcare system and have increased access. It is stated supporting CHWs will ensure that these patients do not get forgotten in the system.

Mental Health Connecticut, Public Policy Coordinator, Mike Finley; supports this bill stating Community Health Workers offer valuable assistance to the individuals they serve. It is stated that low-income households utilize the various services CHWs provide.

New Opportunities, Inc., President & CEO, William Rybczyk; supports this bill stating CHWs provide a comprehensive approach to meeting the social determinants of health in communities. It is stated providing Medicaid reimbursement to Community Health Workers will agencies like New Opportunities to maximize their efforts and impact.

Planned Parenthood, Vice President of Public Policy, Gretchen Raffa; supports this bill stating CHWs services help patients get assistance in finding care, enrolling into a health insurance plan, and advocating for the patient's needs. It is stated CHWs can facilitate connections and greater trust between the community and healthcare systems.

Project Access New Haven, Executive Director, Giselle Carotta; supports this bill stating CHWs focus on connecting individuals in underserved communities with appropriate medical care and resources to address health-related social needs. It is stated CHWs take the time to build relationships with their patients and understand their needs to connect them with appropriate and available services. It is also stated that since CHWs services are based on grant funding, it can be difficult to retain these services and if it were to end, then it can hurt the patients they serve.

Stamford Health, President & CEO, Kathleen Silard; supports this bill stating CHWs engage in health outreach to at-risk communities. It is stated CHWs were effective in the vaccine effort during the COVID-19 pandemic and helped with the connection to primary and preventative care and other social services.

Social Welfare Action Alliance, Volunteer Advocate, Margaret Goodwin; supports this bill stating there is a healthcare crisis and CHWs are helping to make the system work. It is stated CHWs assist patients within the community, answer questions, and take the time to explain various processes so individuals can make informed decisions and have access to services.

Transition Clinic Network, Community Health Worker, Monya Saunders; supports this bill and [shares their personal experience](#) in helping individuals transition from incarceration back into the community. It is stated CHWs need to be funded to help all communities across the state.

Transition Clinic Network, Yale Law Student, Elena Sokoloski; supports this bill stating CHWs work closely with the clinic to connect with individuals who are returning home from incarceration. It is stated CHWs take the time to establish a relationship and begin to understand what each individual needs to successfully reenter. It is also suggested that DSS submits a waiver request to CMS to reimburse CHWs for the services they provide to people incarcerated in state prisons before their release.

Trinity Health of New England, Community Health Worker, Marilia Jose; supports this bill stating CHWs connect resources in the community that can help address barriers and bridge the gap to the medical community. It is stated the efforts CHWs take can lead to improved health outcomes and less avoidable hospitalizations which can be a cost-saving measure for the Medicaid program in the long term.

Trinity Health of New England, Executive Director, Mary Stuart; supports this bill stating CHWs understand the experiences, languages, cultures, and socioeconomic needs of the community they serve. It is stated that through a variety of grants, Trinity Health has been able to support CHWs and the work they provide for their patients. It is stated providing Medicaid reimbursement will allow the continuation of these services to the Medicaid population.

UConn School of Pharmacy, Associate Professor Emeritus, Thomas Buckley; supports this bill stating marginalized individuals who tend to be cared for by CHWs may not often have access to mental health treatment which can make trauma-related symptoms worse. It is stated CHWs services help patients get getting to preventive and primary care services and can be a cost-effective way of care.

United Way of Coastal Fairfield County - Bridgeport Prospers, Community Engagement Manager, Talyn Cook; supports this bill stating Community Health Workers are an effective way to address inequities and promote health, particularly for low-income households served by Medicaid. It is stated CHWs tend to come from the community they serve, therefore, they may have a better understanding and experience, leading the community to have an increase in trust overall. It is stated CHWs should be reimbursed by Medicaid as they serve as the bridge for healthcare workers and the community.

Yale New Haven Health, Senior Government Relations Officer, Jackie Blake; supports this bill stating CHWs have been an integral part of their workforce for more than 10 years. It is stated CHWs work alongside clinical teams and support our acute care patients from the bedside and follow them as they are discharged home into the community addressing many social needs that can cause high readmission rates and poor health outcomes. It is stated their CHW team is funded by health system dollars. It is stated that even though there is no reimbursement for services, Medicaid patients are seen to have shortened lengths of stay and there has been a reduction in hospital readmissions.

Connecticut Resident, Cheshire, Tiffany Morrissey; supports this bill stating the need for Community Health Workers should be reimbursed by Medicaid for their essential services.

Connecticut Resident, Granby, Ellen Thomson; supports this bill stating how difficult it can be to navigate the healthcare system for native English speakers, but it is even more difficult for people who do not speak English or are new to the system. It is stated CHWs are a trusted resource because they come from the same communities in which they serve and have knowledge of navigating the system which makes it easier for their patients to understand what is being told to them.

Connecticut Resident, New Britain, Jose Rivera; supports this bill stating individuals within the community need CHWs who can advocate, navigate the system, and provide information about services.

Connecticut Resident, New Haven, Rosa Gonzalez Juarez; supports this bill and shares their personal experience working as a bilingual community health worker in Northern California. It is stated how this role was impactful within the community to provide support and inform health coaching to 32 low-income patients. It is stated a community-based organization based in Northern California, pays CHWs a living wage. It is stated this helps CHWs successfully engage their community members without worrying about making ends meet.

Connecticut Resident, New London, Stephen Smith, M.D.; supports this bill stating how HUSKY patients scheduled for a colonoscopy either missed the appointment or come poorly prepared. It is stated CHWs could reach out to these patients before their scheduled appointment. It is also stated CHWs can assist with transportation problems, childcare issues, employer requirements, and a basic understanding of what is needed.

Connecticut Resident, North Stonington, Olivia Rinkes; supports this bill stating providing Medicaid reimbursement to Community Health Workers will benefit Connecticut residents. It is stated CHWs are essential and provide a vital resource for providing health care to communities and families.

Connecticut Resident, Stamford CT, Sharon Bradley; supports this bill stating there is a need for more Community Health Workers to help the most vulnerable citizens. It is stated funding must be increased and sustained to provide the quality of life that each resident deserves and to reduce overall health complications and unnecessary inpatient care.

The following individuals have submitted written testimony in support of this bill. It is stated CHWs help members of the community have the quality of life that they deserve. It is stated providing underserved and underrepresented communities with resources and services is making a difference in the lives of these individuals. It is stated Medicaid reimbursements for CHWs should cover a comprehensive list of CHW services, reimburse at rates high enough to employ CHWs at a livable wage and center community, and CHW voices at all stages of design and implementation.

Connecticut Resident, Ansonia, Fanny Andujar

Connecticut Resident, Ansonia, Liza Estevez

Connecticut Resident, Bethel, Laura Shulman Cordeira

Connecticut Resident, Bridgeport, Maria DeJesus

Connecticut Resident, Bridgeport, Ilcoka Rivera

Connecticut Resident, Cos Cob, Jonathan Perloe

Connecticut Resident, Cromwell, Nanfi Lubogo

Connecticut Resident, Middletown, Andre Johnson

Connecticut Resident, Naugatuck, Alison Sanchirico

Connecticut Resident, New Britain, Tawana Hart

Connecticut Resident, New Haven, David Burden

Connecticut Resident, New Haven, Elsa Granata

Connecticut Resident, North Haven, Carmina Cirioli

Connecticut Resident, Norwich, Cynthia Jean-Mary

Connecticut Resident, Preston, Eugene Theroux

Connecticut Resident, Stratford, Nilda Paris

Connecticut Resident, Stratford, Milagrosa Sequinot

Connecticut Resident, Wallingford, Emily Ball

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Emmalyn Coleman

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Michael Coleman

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Dana Evora

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Dwana Etheredge

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Mangalika Gampalage

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Rodney Lunsford

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Jakara Martin

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Rochelle Northover

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Mircarly Ortiz

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Margarita Pinto

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Kristalynn Shell

Ministerial Health Fellowship, Community Health Worker, Monica Dawkins

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Two individuals submitted testimony in opposition to this bill.

Reported by: Kelly Houston

Date: April 4, 2023