

# Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5053

AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

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

**Vote Date:** 3/19/2024

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

**PH Date:** 3/5/2024

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Human Services Committee  
Governor Ned Lamont

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

The purpose of this bill is to implement the governor's budget and allocate funds to health and human services. This bill would reduce wait lists for services in Medicaid waiver programs and streamline reporting for the number of persons waiting for or receiving services through these programs. It would expand the Medicaid waiver program for persons with autism spectrum disorder to ensure they receive care in a timely manner. This bill would also reclassify the position of regional EMS coordinators to ensure that they receive the same benefits and wage increases as their colleagues. The health and wellbeing of residents in Connecticut is of utmost importance and this bill aims to support that.

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language removes the HUSKY C income eligibility reductions, adds to OPM and agency reporting regarding persons with intellectual, and developmental disabilities, makes the human services career pipeline establishment within appropriations, and changes the report date.

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

**The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO), Fellow, Julia Leedy:** supports this bill stating that reducing the waiting lists for services in Medicaid waiver programs would be beneficial for individuals with autism and developmental

disabilities. It is also stated that the availability of necessary services on time can prevent potentially life-threatening conditions in people with autism.

**Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Commissioner, Jordan Scheff;** supports this bill stating that it would eliminate unnecessary duplicate report requirements and reduce confusion on report formatting and execution.

**Department of Social Services, Commissioner (DSS), Andrea Barton Reeves;** supports this bill stating that Connecticut is the only state providing Medicaid coverage to parents and relative caregivers with incomes over 138% of the federal poverty level (FPL). It is also stated that individuals who are ineligible for Medicaid coverage after FY 2025 will have access to coverage under Covered CT, Access Health CT, or their employer-sponsored insurance.

**Department of Public Health (DPH), Commissioner, Manisha Juthani;** supports this bill stating that reclassifying the position of regional EMS coordinators would improve recruitment and retention for this job. It is also stated that the pay level for these positions has not risen in over twelve years as they are excluded from pay raises that other state employees receive.

**Office of Policy and Management, Secretary (OPM), Jeffrey Beckham;** supports this bill stating that it leverages federal dollars, minimizes benefit cliffs, and optimizes the use of state funds. It is also stated that this bill would improve the administration of regional emergency medical services and streamline reporting requirements.

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

**Association of Connecticut Ambulance Providers, President, Gregory Allard;** supports this bill stating that transitioning Regional EMS Coordinators into classified service is vital as these employees provide invaluable service and knowledge to EMS providers and organizations throughout Connecticut.

**New Britain Emergency Medical Services, CEO, Bruce Baxter;** supports this bill stating that the lack of competitive wages and benefits has resulted in vacant EMS Regional Coordinator positions.

**Connecticut Resident, Gregory Allard;** supports this bill stating that Section 1 will allow Regional EMS Coordinators the same benefits as their colleagues within the Department of Public Health Office of Emergency Medical Services.

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

**The Arc of Connecticut, Inc., Executive Director, Win Evarts;** opposes this bill stating that the projected cuts would cause harm to low-income residents in the state and increase health disparities. It is also stated that the cuts will increase the amount of medical debt by reducing essential services that are currently accessed under Medicaid.

**AARP Connecticut, Anna Doroghazi;** opposes this bill stating that it will make it more difficult for many of Connecticut's most vulnerable and medically needy residents to access Medicaid support. It is also stated that HUSKY C is important for older adults and people with

disabilities, even if they also receive Medicare, because it grants access to services such as dental services, vision care, and medical transportation, among others.

**Center for Disability Rights, Consumer Service Advocate, Richard Famiglietti;** opposes this bill stating that it facilitates discrimination by lowering the income limit for HUSKY C. It is also stated that the elderly and people with disabilities are subject to much lower income and asset limits for accessing Medicaid than able-bodied people.

**Connecticut Citizen Action Group, (CCAG), Associate Director, Liz Dupont-Diehl;** opposes this bill stating that lowering the income eligibility for HUSKY Health is not a viable solution and would threaten the health equity of the state.

**Connecticut Legal Rights Project Inc., Executive Director, Kathy Flaherty;** opposes this bill stating that shrinking the income limit would take away almost all the progress made by the legislature last year and would result in an exacerbation of health disparities.

**Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Executive Director, TJ Clark II;** opposes this bill stating that the proposed cuts to Medicaid programs will exacerbate health disparities and sever coverage for individuals at income levels disproportionately represented by Black and Brown communities.

**Disability Rights Connecticut, Litigation Attorney, Sheldon Toubman;** opposes this bill stating that the cuts would disproportionately affect Black and Brown people and would increase medical debt because there would no longer be coverage for services that used to be covered under Medicaid.

**Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Policy Advocate, Caleb Pulda-Rifkin;** opposes this bill stating that the cuts will cause harm to their clients who are mostly low-income residents in the state. It is also stated that the projected savings of \$2.1 million are not worth the harm caused by this cut.

**HAVEN Free Clinic, Director of the Medical Debt, and Insurance Counseling Department, Himani Pattisam;** opposes this bill stating it would diminish the significant gains made to the HUSKY program over the last few years. It is also stated that directing those above the income limit for HUSKY Health to Covered CT is not a viable solution as these individuals would still have to pay out-of-pocket costs.

**Hispanic Health Council, Policy Advocacy Manager, Megan Scharrer;** opposes this bill stating that Covered CT was never intended to be a HUSKY replacement and therefore it should not be treated as such. It is also stated that Connecticut has a much higher cost of living than most other states and therefore the proposed cuts cannot be compared to the income eligibility in other states.

**Keep The Promise Coalition, Executive Director, Jordan Fairchild;** opposes this bill stating that the proposed cuts are discriminatory and will negatively impact people with disabilities and older adults. It is also stated caretaker relatives on HUSKY A who are also on Medicare are ineligible for federal subsidies on the exchange, meaning they cannot qualify for Covered CT.

**National Alliance on Mental Illness, Public Policy and Affiliates Relations Manager, Thomas Burr;** opposes this bill stating that individuals moved from HUSKY A to Covered CT will lose their long-term care coverage and receive no replacement under Covered CT. It is also stated that these individuals will lose access to other services not covered under Medicare such as medical transportation, dental, eyeglasses, hearing aids, and more. It is stated that individuals with disabilities and older adults would be negatively impacted by losing their Medicaid benefits.

**Social Welfare Action Alliance Connecticut, Member, Maggie Goodwin;** opposes this bill stating that it rescinds the positive changes made last year and allows the state to discriminate against the elderly and disabled through the Medicaid eligibility financial standards.

**The following individuals submitted written testimony in opposition to this bill.**

Connecticut Resident, Waterbury, Joseph Cintia

Connecticut Resident, Jacob D'addario

Connecticut Resident, North Haven, Timothy Gabriele

Connecticut Resident, Windsor, Donna Grossman

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENTS:**

**Brooker Memorial, Executive Director, Christina Emery;** takes no position on this bill and suggests increasing the pediatric dental rate for community safety net providers to ensure all children have equitable access to dental services.

**Reported by: Jaclyn Rauch**

**Date: April 8, 2024**