

# Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5456

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS.

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

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

**PH Date:** 3/12/2024

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Human Services Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

For too long there have been blocks on health care facilities to provide appropriate care, tailored to patients. Restrictions on bundled dental care services have limited the flexibility of providers to give care to patients in a way that accommodates patients' livelihoods and comfort. Additionally, cost increases have not been reflected in reimbursement rates that facilities are receiving, and blocks to compensate through other revenue sources create untenable losses. Due to a lack of funding because of the incorporation of cost adjustments in October, many facilities are left underfunded throughout the majority of the calendar year.

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language requires an annual rate increase to January 1 based on the recent increase in the Medicare Economic Index.

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

**Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner, Andrea Barton Reeves;** supports the intent of the bill, but opposes its proposals. It is stated that FQHCs have unique rights under federal law and DSS incorporates these requirements into their implementation of the Medicaid program. It is stated that this bill would impose costly requirements beyond the funding DSS currently has. Section One would inconvenience patients and hinder efficiency. Section Two would limit DSS in evaluating change in scope requests, making rate-setting processes no longer holistic. Section Three would result in increasing amounts paid to FQHCs by \$6 million annually.

**The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO), Lead Aging Policy Analyst, Micheal Werner;** supports this bill stating it will grant access to vulnerable populations throughout the state. It is stated children and families can get oral health care through more inclusive and accessible means.

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

**The Alliance, Public Policy and Advocacy Associate, Monika Nugent;** supports HB5456 stating this fixes the unintended consequences of having patients be confined to one dental visit. It is stated that patients without regular dental visits may not be able to have all services completed in one visit and extending reimbursements to cover multiple visits will aid them. It is also stated that Sections Two & Three will update payment for the first time since 2002. It is stated Section Three alone will implement cost increases in January, not October, which has left FQHCs underfunded throughout the year.

**CT Association of School-Based Health Centers, Executive Director, Melanie Wilde-Lane;** supports the bill and provides substitute language for Section Three. It is stated that this bill will allow FQHC organizations that sponsor school-based health centers to continue to offer support for young people, a vital part of our community.

**Charter Oak Health Center, CEO, Rick Markello;** supports this bill stating that Connecticut has the lowest FQHC reimbursement rates in New England and this bill would adjust this to 2023 costs. It is suggested that Section Three be adjusted so that the costs will be updated in January instead of in October annually.

**Community Health Center, President & Founder, Mark Masselli;** supports this bill stating these changes will roll back harmful dental regulations and set the annual inflation adjustment to occur in January, respectively.

**Community Health Center Association of Connecticut, CEO, Shawn Frick;** supports this bill and provides substitute language for Section Three. It is stated repeal in Section One will allow more flexibility of care to dental patients. It is stated that Section Two alters the rebate rates to be in accordance with 2023 costs, improving the viability of health centers. It is stated that changes in Section Three will increase Medicaid reimbursement rates at the beginning of the calendar year, which will result in a one-time state cost of \$4-5 million.

**Connecticut Institute for Communities, President & CEO, Katherine McKeon Curran;** supports this bill stating that unbundling allows accommodation for patients' needs and improves access for vulnerable individuals. It is stated that Section Two would allow for a fair and transparent rate review process. It is suggested that Section Three should be clarified as to when reimbursements would be announced.

**Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Executive Director, TJ Clarke II;** supports this bill stating the importance of FQHCs in providing dental services to underserved individuals across Connecticut. It is stated that reimbursement of oral health care visits at FQHCs promotes equitable care access across socioeconomic status.

**Cornell Scott-Hill Health Corporation, CEO, Michael Taylor;** supports this bill and provides substitute language for Section Three. It is stated that Section One repeals a policy

that has limited the flexibility of providers to serve the dental needs of people in need. It is stated that Section Two addresses cost losses. It is stated that without the ability to “cost-shift” commercial patients, and the reimbursement rates based on 2002 costs, Cornell Scott-Hill urges the implementation of Section Two. Lastly, it is stated that Section Three makes changes so that Connecticut is no longer one of the only states that implement cost increases in October.

**Generations Family Health Center, CEO, Melissa Meyers;** supports this bill stating the gap between costs and Medicaid rates has become “untenable”. It is stated that rebasing to accommodate 2023 costs will have an immediate impact on health center viability. It is stated there has been a loss of dental visits since the language in PA 22-118, Section 239 has been implemented, and its repeal, stated in Section One, will fix this and allow patient-provider flexibility.

**StayWell Health Center, President & CEO, Donald Thompson;** supports this bill and provides substitute language for Section Three. It is stated that Section One repeals the harmful language of PA 22-118, Section 239, now allowing for nonemergency services to be spread across multiple visits. It is stated that Section 2 addresses the minimal cost adjustments since 2002, cost-shifting for commercial patients, and scope changes, specifically to help work with DSS. It is also stated that Section Three makes changes so that Connecticut is no longer one of the only states that implement cost increases in October.

**United Community & Family Services, President & CEO, Jennifer Granger;** supports this bill in full in addressing the synergistic harm that HUSKY-enrolled people endure. It is stated that Section One addresses the social determinants of health for many patients, allowing for multiple visits. It is also stated that Section Two is about access and its allowance of patients to receive services, specifically those that DSS arbitrarily denies.

**Wheeler, President & CEO, Sabrina Trocchi;** supports this bill stating that Section One repeals language that allows for flexibility in dental services across time. It is stated that Section Two alters the rebate rates to be in accordance with 2023 costs, improving the viability of health centers. It is also stated that Section Three makes changes so that Connecticut is no longer one of the only states that implement cost increases in October.

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

None expressed.

**Reported by: Jack Tyler**

**Date: April 1, 2024**