

# REPORT ON BILLS FAVORABLY REPORTED BY COMMITTEE

**COMMITTEE:** Human Services Committee

**File No.:**

**Bill No.:** HB-6943

**PH Date:** 3/22/2005

**Action/Date:** JFS Change of Reference

3/31/05

**Reference Change:** Appropriations

## **TITLE OF BILL:**

AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCEMENTS TO THE MEDICAID PROGRAM.

## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Human Services Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

To (1) restore the availability of certain medical services under the Medicaid program, (2) require the Commissioner of DSS to adjust the unearned income disregard, used to make eligibility determinations, by any corresponding increase to the consumer price index, and (3) require the Commissioner of DSS, in consultation with the advisory council created pursuant to this act, to review the rules of eligibility concerning the Medicaid program and thereafter report back to the legislature on findings and recommendations.

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

Claudette Beaulieu and Michael Starkowski/Deputy Commissioners, Department of Social Services, testified: "We are opposed to the enhancements, restorations and administrative requirements to the Medicaid program reflected in this bill, as they represent significant unfunded costs to the agency's resources and the state budget."

Leslie Gabel-Brett/Executive Director, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, testified: "We support this bill that would restore coverage for certain important medical services such as physical therapy and podiatry, create a short-term advisory council to review income and assets eligibility and other measures to strengthen the Medicaid program. We particularly want to highlight and support Section 2(b), which would add coverage for periodontal screening for pregnant women. Untreated periodontal disease is a risk factor for poor birth outcomes. Increasing access to periodontal screening for low-income pregnant women will improve healthy outcomes for newborns."

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

Mag Morelli/President, Connecticut Assn. of Not-for-Profit Providers for the Aging, testified: "CANPFA supports the restoration of eliminated Medicaid coverage for optional services so that older adults who depend on Medicaid coverage to supplement their limited Medicare benefits may receive adequate medical care. The lack of coverage for these services places individuals who are dually eligible in a particular bind when their Medicare funding is exhausted, but they continue to require therapies no longer considered a Medicaid covered expense. Often these individuals are forced to discontinue the therapies. There are very compelling reasons to restore these benefits for older adults who reside in nursing homes. In addition to the need to maintain the legal obligations to nursing home residents . . . the state can save money by providing needed preventive services rather than waiting for expensive exacerbation of medical problems. This applies to podiatric care for diabetics, for example. By failing to pay appropriately for routine preventive care, the state unwittingly relegates many of its poorest and frailest citizens to undue deterioration before their problems can be addressed and adds to the increasing financial burden on our skilled nursing facilities."

Robert Slate/Executive Director, CT Oral Health Initiative, testified: "There can be no fiscal health without physical health for our state's residents. We know that smart dollars invested in preventive health care (and most dental problems are preventable) reap huge savings later in reduced need for emergency care. The facts are clear:

- There is an oral health crisis in CT.
- Dental decay is the most common chronic disease among CT's children.
- Dental disease is the No. 1 reason new military recruits cannot be placed on active duty.
- 1 in 4 CT children is on Medicaid, but 2 of 3 CT children receive no dental care.

We know that oral health is an integral part of general health. Poor oral health can contribute to diabetes and heart disease, among other conditions. Research now clearly links poor dental health and preterm babies. Prematurity affects 10% of CT births. Costs of caring for one premature newborn easily can exceed \$150,000. A dental exam costs less than \$20 for an adult on Medicaid. Medicaid service saves money. . . (Yet) some 300,000 poor children receive little or no dental care in CT.

Kate McEvoy/Assistant Director, CT Assn. of Area Agencies on Aging, testified: "CAAAA supports HB 6943, subsections of which seek to restore coverage for services including podiatry, physical and occupational therapy, and interpreters for the hearing impaired, and annually to increase the unearned disregard by the change in the Consumer Price Index. Restoration of coverage for the services enumerated in this bill is vitally important as the services have both preventative and rehabilitative benefits that ultimately safeguard the state from making significantly higher

expenditures in more costly care settings such as hospitals and nursing homes."

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

Art Mongillo

04/18/2005

Nancy V. Ahern

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Reported by

Date