

Testimony Opposing

H.B. 6227: An Act Concerning Changes to the General Statutes concerning the Department of Children and Families

Sharon D. Langer

Before the Select Committee on Children

February 3, 2011

House Chair Urban, Acting Senate Chair Musto, and Members of the Committee:

I am testifying today on behalf of the Connecticut Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council (the Council) of which I am appointed member, and as Senior Policy Fellow with Connecticut Voices for Children. Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

The Council oversees the successful partnership between the Departments of Children and Families (DCF) and Social Services (DSS) to provide critically needed mental health and substance abuse services to HUSKY families and children in DCF care. The CTBHP was launched in 2006 after much planning and collaboration among the state agencies, providers and advocates to "carve out" behavioral health services from managed care organizations. The CTBHP is managed by Value Options, which provides utilization management and other administrative services on a fixed cost basis. The providers are paid directly by the Departments and the federal government pays at least half of most services through Medicaid and CHIP. The over-arching goal of this experiment was to improve access to community-based services for children and their families in order to reduce the numbers and lengths of stay of children in emergency rooms, in-patient hospitalizations and other settings. In so doing, the CTBHP would improve health outcomes and reduce the costs associated with the most expensive care, e.g., hospitalization and in-state and out-of-state residential treatment.

Recently, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) became a member of the Council. DMHAS and DSS have now launched another Partnership, the CT Behavioral Health Recovery Plan (CTBHRP) to provide utilization services to the adults in Medicaid fee-for-service. This latest partnership is just getting off the ground. Value Options was awarded the contract through a competitive bidding process, and now is managing both Partnerships.

Although we on the Council are generally pleased with the level of transparency provided by the Departments and their contractor, Value Options, we nonetheless oppose H.B. 6227 (Sec. 6) which would repeal General Statutes Sec. 17a-22m. "Annual evaluation of Behavioral Health Partnership. Report to General Assembly."

Sec. 17a-22m requires the Departments to conduct an annual evaluation of the CTBHP and report to the Appropriations, Public Health and Human Services Committees of the General Assembly concerning "the provision of behavioral health services under the Behavioral Health Partnership, including information on the status of the administrative services organization implementation, the status of the collaboration among the Departments of Children and Families and Social Services, the

services provided, the number of persons served, program outcomes and spending by child and adult populations.”

We on the Council believe strongly that the General Assembly should receive regular reports on how well this \$150 million program is fulfilling its goals and objectives as set forth in statute. In addition, although required by law, *there has never been an independent evaluation of the CTBHP*. In 2005, the evaluation was rescinded. Many of us on the Council protested this penny-wise and pound-foolish decision.

The CTBHP has now grown to encompass virtually the entire Medicaid population – low-income adults, persons with disabilities and seniors. This is no time to eliminate the Departments reporting responsibilities to the General Assembly.

Given these difficult budgetary and economic times, it is more important than ever that the committees of cognizance in the General Assembly know how each scarce dollar is being spent. For all the reasons stated above, we urge this Committee to oppose H.B 6227.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. If you have any further questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.