

Testimony Supporting S.B. 877: An Act Concerning Mental Health Parity

Sharon D. Langer

Insurance and Real Estate Committee

February 10, 2011

Senator Crisco, Representative Megna, and Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

I am a Senior Policy Fellow with Connecticut Voices for Children (CT Voices), a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

I am here today on behalf of Connecticut Voices to **support** *S.B. 877, An Act Concerning Mental Health Parity* and specifically to endorse the testimony submitted by Connecticut's Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA). As OHA has explained to the Committee, SB 877 gives the state Insurance Department the power to enforce the federal mental health parity law, Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA).

We agree with OHA's suggestions to amend the bill in order to make clear that the MHPAEA does not apply to companies with 50 or fewer employees to make it consistent with existing state law. In addition, we agree with OHA's proposed amendment to the General Statutes Section 38a-514a to "ensure that codifying the MHPAEA does not inadvertently relieve policies from the existing obligations under" that section of state law.

I am an appointed member of the Connecticut Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council (CTBHPOC), which oversees the provision of mental health and substance abuse services for HUSKY families and children in the care of the Department of Children and Families. I am also the co-chair of the coordination of care subcommittee of the CTBHPOC. As a result, I can attest to the importance of helping adults and children obtain timely and appropriate mental health and substance abuse care. In this way we help children grow up healthy and ready to learn. We enable adults to work and support their families, and in the long run, we save the state and families from incurring much greater fiscal and emotional costs when serious mental health and substance abuse conditions go untreated.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 877.

Feel free to contact me if you need additional information or have questions.