

# Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-280

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING NATUROPATHS.

**Vote Date:** 3/24/2022

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/10/2022

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Human Services Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill will add services from a licensed naturopath as a covered service under the Medicaid state plan. This bill also requires the Department of Social Services to amend the Medicaid state plan, by October 1, 2022, to cover services provided by a licensed naturopath.

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

**Deidre S. Gifford, Commissioner, Department of Social Services (DSS):** The Department states that the naturopaths currently provide Medicaid services for people under age 21, a provision which implemented in January 2003 as part of a legislative mandate to eliminate coverage for certain optional services for adults. The DSS notes that currently, only Vermont, Oregon and Washington provide similar coverage under Medicaid. The Department cannot support this bill because the expansion of naturopathic services to Medicaid members ages 21 and older is not included in the Governor's recommended adjustments to the budget.

**Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity:** The Commission argues that COVID-19, and its associated restrictions have had an impact on health, obesity and nutrition for families and older adults. Expanding access to existing innovative services, such as naturopathy, could help address nutrition and dietary education concerns for a wider population, by these health interventions, which are otherwise typically expensive and only available out of pocket. They claim that naturopathy includes alternative natural therapies, which are typically less invasive than most traditional methods, such as expensive surgeries or prescription medications.

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

**American Association of Naturopathic Physicians:** supports SB 280 because naturopathic medicine can help lower healthcare costs. The testimony states that naturopathic medicine decreases prescription drug costs and offers true disease protection. They further state that in Washington, Oregon, New Mexico, and Vermont, NDs are hired to care for Medicaid patients in county health departments, community clinics, FQHCs, and many private outpatient clinics. The clinics with naturopathic doctors covered by Medicaid in Washington and Oregon alone care for more than 30,000 Medicaid patients per year.

**Robert Brody, Naturopathic Physicians, Personalized Natural Medicine:** supports this legislation. It is stated in the testimony that naturopathic physicians are already in HUSKY system and so expanding coverage to include adults would expand access. Naturopaths have completed medical school, passed licensing exams and boards, and meet Connecticut's standards for receiving and maintaining a medical license. Naturopaths recommend dietary and lifestyle changes to help keep people healthy, allowing them to live better lives, and help keep our hospitals and emergency clinics empty which allows the overworked hospital staff to focus more on their acute patients on an individual level, providing better care for them.

**Lindsey Well, President, Connecticut Naturopathic Physicians Association:** supports the passage of this bill. In the testimony it states that naturopathic physicians participate in insurance plans and networks, work in FQHCs, and provide services in workers comp program but the gap is low-income residents because Medicaid does not cover it. This bill would be a major step in the right direction and provide a new provider type that focuses more on prevention and wellness as a healthcare option for low-income individuals and families in our state.

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

None expressed.

**Reported by: Isaac Agyemang-Duah**

**Date: 03/31/2022**