

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1

AN ACT CONCERNING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CONNECTICUT

Title: RESIDENTS.

Vote Date: 2/16/2024

Vote Action: Vote to Draft

PH Date: 3/18/2024

File No.: 315

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill addresses several issues regarding the delivery of healthcare in Connecticut, workplace violence, and the safety of healthcare workers. The bill also has a provision to address the increasing number of medical school graduates who are unable to find a residency program. The bill includes the following:

- Requires home health agencies to collect information as to who might be in the patient's home when the healthcare worker visits and provide this information to agency employees prior to the scheduled visit.
- Requires home health agencies to train staff on safety-related issues.
- Requires home health agencies to report incidents of verbal or physical abuse to the Department of Public Health (DPH).
- Requires Department of Social Services (DSS) to increase reimbursement to agencies who provide safety escorts for home visits.
- Requires DPH to create a grant program for the purchase of safety technology and appropriates \$1 million for the program.
- Requires the Public Health Committee to create working groups to study the following
 - a) staff safety issues for home health agencies,
 - b) non-alcoholic fatty liver disease,
 - c) health hazards for nail salon workers
 - d) loneliness and isolation.
- Creates a graduate licensure program for medical school graduates who were unable to get a residency position.
- Requires DPH to provide educational material on gun violence to primary care providers for annual distribution to patients.

- Requires DPH and the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) to study and report on prescription drug shortages.
- Requires Department of Children and Families (DCF) to do in-person home visits when there is information that the parent or guardian has a substance abuse problem.
- Prohibits hospitals from requiring physicians to participate in maintenance of certification (MOC) programs.
- Prohibits certain insurers from denying reimbursement to providers who do not participate in MOC programs
- Requires pharmacies to provide, for free, a drug deactivation and disposal system to patients receiving an opioid prescription.
- Removes a current exemption from the Labor Relations Act for physicians and physician assistants (PAs) who work at DPH-licensed institutions.
- Requires certain insurance policies to cover coronary calcium scans.
- Requires DPH to develop a plan for healthcare facility readiness during cybersecurity attacks. It also appropriates \$25000/year for 4 years for a related annual meeting.
- Requires DPH to create an initiative to address health conditions affecting the brain.
- Requires DPH to maintain a Parkinson's Disease registry and a data oversight committee to monitor the registry.
- Requires Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to create a program providing specialized treatment for schizophrenia spectrum disorder.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Nancy Navaretta, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):

DMHAS has serious concerns with Section 1 of the bill which requires home health agencies to provide information to its employees as to who may be at home with the client when they visit. Psychiatric history is included in this mandate and this information is protected by privacy standards. DMHAS is also worried that reporting of behavioral health issues will further stigmatize these individuals. DMHAS recognizes the need for risk assessments for safety reasons but also looks for balance advocating for the necessary respect and recognition of the individuals served. Regarding Section 29, while DMHAS is supportive of the dispensing and deactivation systems for opioid disposal, the proposed funding solution, to use funds from the opioid settlement fund, requires approval of the Opioid Settlement Approval Committee (OSAC). DMHAS will work to develop the concept for presentation to OSAC.

Martin Looney, President Pro Tempore, State of Connecticut Senate:

Senator Looney referenced the senseless loss of 2 home health nurses in the last year in his testimony in favor of enhanced safety measures for home health employees. He also noted the bill provides a grant program for providing safety technology to protect these employees. The bill also provides for information on gun safety, as well as addresses responses to cybersecurity threats to healthcare institutions. Senator Looney also highlighted the effort to develop a healthy brain initiative and the creation of a working group to study loneliness and isolation.

Henri Martin, Senator (31st District), Connecticut General Assembly (CGA):

Senator Martin testified that Bristol Hospital, the community hospital in his district, was losing staff trained by Bristol Hospital to UCONN because of its enhanced employment packages. With UConn, a state-run institution, not having to train these employees, the "playing field" is not level, one hospital is incurring costs that benefit UConn, and community hospitals are suffering a loss of valuable employees.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut State Medical Society (CSMS):

CSMS acknowledges the problem confronting a growing number of medical school graduates who are unable to get a residency program placement. The physician graduate program established in this bill is a viable attempt to address this problem, particularly in the face of a growing physician shortage. Regarding Sections 24, 25, the Maintenance of Certification (MOC) plays a role in lifelong learning but presents a financial and time burden to physicians. Also, hospitals need a meaningful way of assessing the credentials of its providers. CSMS is concerned that the prohibition of using the MOC will remove a useful tool for this assessment.

Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA):

CHA appreciates the effort to enhance the work previously done to address the safety of home health workers but is conflicted over the requirement to share psychiatric information which is protected by privacy standards. CHA also has concerns about the practical application of the section requiring information on people who may be in the home with the client. In general, CHA supports the provisions that provide for the grant program for safety technology, safety training of employees, and the inclusion of CHA in the working group studying safety issues for home health employees.

Tracy Wodatch, President and CEO, CT Association for Healthcare at Home (CAHH):

CAHH supports Sections 2-9, while opposing Section 1. The main argument against Sect 1 is that this section will be affected by the output of the working group provided in Section 8. The need for enhanced safety measures for home health employees has never been more obvious than now after the tragic deaths of 2 home health nurses.

Gary Sekorski, COO, For All Ages, Inc:

For All Ages supports the efforts to address loneliness and isolation in this bill. With estimates of half of the Connecticut population suffering from loneliness and isolation, it is time for the state to develop plans to meet this need. For All Ages suggests an edit to Section 36 (4) (b) that recommends the working group include a representative of an organization that is currently working in this space.

Elizabeth Ryan, Policy Counsel, Everytown for Gun Safety:

Connecticut has already established itself as a leader in gun safety and is well known for the creation of the Commission on Community Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention. But it cannot continue to perform its vital function without a sustainable funding source. These programs are vital to combating gun violence and they deserve to be included in the priorities of SB1.

Others in Support of the Bill:

Kim Sandor, Executive Director, CT Nurses Association
Regina Stankaitis
Jason Sundby, Deterra Systems
Jonathan Perloe, Director of Communications, CT Against Gun Violence
Mag Morelli, President, Leading Age Connecticut
Ed Hawthorne, President, CT AFL-CIO
Rebecca Gilbert, American Parkinson Disease Association

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Julian Koruni, PharmD, President, Connecticut Pharmacist Association:

While applauding the intent of safe disposal of opioid medications, Dr. Koruni is concerned that this will run concurrently with other programs in the state and place an undue burden on pharmacists around the state and waste valuable funding.

Anne Manusky, President, CT Republican Assembly:

Ms. Manusky believes that the government is practicing overreach with the introduction of this bill. She believes this is an attempt to usurp control of the people.

Reported by: Dave Rackliffe

Date: March 20, 2024