

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-317

Title: AN ACT EXPANDING THE COVERED CONNECTICUT PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 3/19/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/7/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Despite policy efforts to improve the affordability of health care coverage in CT, many uninsured people cite the high insurance cost as the main reason they lack coverage. Most uninsured families make too much money to qualify for traditional Medicaid services yet lack the funds to cover even a portion of the cost of health insurance through an employer or the healthcare marketplace. This gap in coverage is a challenge for individuals and families that present for care when in crisis, creating a strain on the healthcare system and shifting the cost of care to the insured. Expanding the care model to include coverage for those caught in the gap between Medicaid and affordable coverage by using additional federal funds at a very favorable match rate, will improve their health, productivity, and quality of life while reducing the burden of uncompensated care on the health care system.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language adds Section 1 by expanding the original program to 200% FPL.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner, Andrea Barton Reeves; opposes the bill stating that currently this program is being supported by enhanced subsidies and federal reimbursement through a demonstration waiver authorized through 2025 and 2027. Additionally, it is stated that \$10 million in ARPA funding in the enacted budget is available to design incentives or subsidies that assist small employers, and their employees access affordable coverage on the exchange. It is stated additional expansion to cover individuals and families between 200% and 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) would require additional state funds and administrative costs not provided for in the Governor's budget

proposal. It is stated the Department supports the goal of reducing uninsured rates in the state.

Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA), Acting Healthcare Advocate, Sean King; supports this bill stating that expanding the number of CT residents eligible to receive at least partial assistance under the Covered CT program, furthers the program's overall mission of ensuring affordable access to healthcare. It is stated in the current environment the additional assistance may make the difference between poverty and prosperity and OHA would welcome its expansion.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticare, Inc., AVP of Government Affairs, Michelle Rakebrand; supports this bill stating it would create a second tier of CoveredCT making coverage available to those not currently eligible for the program but find other coverage unaffordable. It is suggested that technical changes could be made to the language to reflect a Medicaid cost-sharing model for all in-network providers and services under the CoveredCT program which would maximize the use of state and federal dollars while preserving the integrity of the program into the future.

Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Policy, Research, & Government Relations Director, Ray Rossomando; expresses support of this bill stating that the CEA is interested in having those in education have adequate healthcare coverage for themselves and their families, and the expansion of Covered CT would benefit many early career educators. It is stated that healthcare coverage for educators and their families plays a vital role in supporting them in their essential work in our schools, knowing their own healthcare needs will be met.

Stamford Health, CEO & President, Kathleen Silard; supports this bill stating individuals with insurance coverage are more likely to receive primary and preventative care that if left untreated leads to expensive and disabling complications. It is stated that ensuring access to families earning 300% of the Federal Poverty Level will leave more room in the budget for necessities such as food. It is stated that the expansion of Covered CT will provide meaningful financial assistance for individuals and families who have known health benefits.

The following individuals have submitted written testimony in support of the bill:

Connecticut Resident, Laura Rinaldi

Connecticut Resident, Ray Rinaldi

One person has submitted written testimony anonymously in support of this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENTS:

Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA); takes no stance on the bill but applauds the work of the legislature to build on investments that have been made to expand access to health insurance coverage. It is stated the legislature should proceed with caution to avoid policies that would impact the individual health insurance market, employer-sponsored health insurance, and the benefits and cost-sharing associated with the plan.

**Reported by: Rebecca McClanahan & Elyssa
Romero**

Date: April 9, 2024