

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-397

AN ACT EXPANDING MEDICAID COVERAGE OF SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH

Title: CARE.

Vote Date: 3/19/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/14/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

School-based care provides an opportunity for students to access much-needed preventive care, early identification of unmet needs, and referral from a trusted and known provider, the school nurse. Lack of access to care in the early stages of illness often results in the need for more expensive outpatient visits, urgent care, emergent care, or even hospitalization for physical and behavioral health needs. Funding the program based on the characteristics of the school population, rather than Medicaid eligibility for the individual family, could remove barriers to care and reduce the stigma of seeking care. The program would benefit from an interagency coalition to maximize Medicaid funding. Health care during childhood correlates with improved health outcomes in childhood and adulthood, better education outcomes, and lower mortality rates. Children, their families, and the community can benefit from access to health care in a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment with providers they know and trust.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language removes the reference to school-based health centers in Section 2 as they already bill Medicaid.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

***Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner Andrea Barton Reeves;** opposes this bill due to the significant unbudgeted cost, administrative complexities, and revenue loss to the state. It is stated that under federal law, Medicaid programs can only support people*

who have been determined eligible for Medicaid. It is stated that the current School Based Child Health (SBCH) Medicaid benefit reimburses for the medical and behavioral health costs of Medicaid-eligible students for services by school district special education programs based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP). It is stated that currently 117 of 160 public school districts, also known as local education authorities (LEAs), are participating in the Medicaid SBCH benefit. Because SBCH is a set of services coverable under the Medicaid State Plan, which is the current federal approval, there is likely no need for a Medicaid waiver. It is stated a different funding structure could potentially be a significant cost to the state budget which would further complicate the administrative effort and expense for both school districts and DSS. It is stated that the capacity of the Department's Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) claiming system may not be capable of supporting these changes. It is suggested that thoughtful planning and informed stakeholder engagement should take place to better understand the potential impacts of such substantial changes as proposed.

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, Lead AAPI Policy Analyst, Megan Baker:

supports this bill as it addresses a significant gap in access to healthcare for vulnerable student populations and reduces existing disparities. It is stated that Medicaid has been shown to positively impact education outcomes, with children eligible for Medicaid for longer periods exhibiting lower dropout rates and higher rates of bachelor's degree attainment. It is stated the financial benefits of Medicaid cannot be overstated, as children enrolled in the program are found to earn higher incomes and contribute more taxes later in life. It is suggested that an amendment to the language in Section 1(c) lines 24-25 read as follows: "and other languages as requested on a need basis within the demographic profile of students enrolled in bilingual education programs in kindergarten through twelfth grade in the state."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), Attorney John Flanders:

supports this bill stating the cost of providing special education and related services is very high with nearly 18% of students in many districts qualifying for an IEP. It is stated schools are pressed between their desire to control costs and their obligation to provide students with appropriate public education and may outsource the application for Medicaid funds as the process is cumbersome, difficult, and time-consuming. It is also stated that by increasing the percentage of reimbursement available to the school and using a streamlined process for application, schools will be encouraged to access important sources of revenue currently left on the table.

Advocate for School Nursing, Donna Kosiorowski, MS, RN, NCSN-E:

supports this bill stating reimbursement for services offered through the office of school nurses as this care contributes to the academic success of students by identifying health barriers that may impact a student's ability to learn. It is stated that "school-based healthcare" must be clearly defined and the difference between School-Based Health Centers must be made clear. It is stated that documentation requirements for reimbursement must be made clear as school nurses have not dedicated "prep" time during the school day. It is stated that careful planning and buy-in for all stakeholders are essential.

Effective School Solutions, CEO, Duncan Young; supports leveraging Medicaid funding to sustain school-based mental health (MH) services. It is stated that schools are great locations for expanding MH access, with students six times more likely to access and complete MH treatment when it is offered in a school setting. It is stated building upon the framework of this bill can ensure that all Medicaid-eligible students can access high acuity MH treatment via school-based services, address the administrative burden on the school district, clarify that clinical services by district staff and contracted staff would be reimbursable, and completing required evaluation of outcomes.

The following individuals have submitted written testimony in support of this bill. It is stated that this bill will improve access to care and reduce costs.

Ledyard High School, Student, Aubrey Crowe
Connecticut Resident, Halle Lisette Pierce

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Zahar Abuda; opposes the bill because of the lack of inclusion for Arab, Yoruba, Oromo, or Hausa and other languages for the African and Arab diaspora.

Reported by: Rebecca McClanahan

Date: April 3, 2024