

Legal Assistance Resource Center

❖ of Connecticut, Inc. ❖

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Testimony presented to the Appropriations Committee in support of

the Office of the Healthcare Advocate

by Jane McNichol, Executive Director
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I am Jane McNichol, Executive Director of the Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut, the advocacy and support center for legal services programs in the state. We represent the interests of very low income residents of the state.

I am submitting this testimony to indicate our strong support of an independent Office of Healthcare Advocate which can continue its important work providing assistance to consumers in the changing health care environment.

The Healthcare Advocate and the staff of the Office of Healthcare Advocate (OHA) have been valuable allies in our work to preserve and expand health care access for low-income residents of Connecticut. The Legal Services programs have found OHA's ability to analyze and respond to recent federal health care reform proposals and to take the lead in developing Connecticut's Sustinet program particularly helpful. In working to implement and design these new policies, OHA has been aware of and advocated for the interests of people participating in Medicaid and other low-income residents of the state.

OHA has been an active and intelligent voice for low-income consumers on the Medicaid Care Management Oversight Council (formerly the Medicaid Managed Care Council) and has also represented many of them on an individual basis before various state agencies and managed care organizations. With the advent of changes in Medicaid administration in the state, federal health care reform, and Sustinet, low-income health care consumers will have even more need for an independent entity which can advocate for them in public policy debates as well as represent them in individual disputes.

The Office of Healthcare Advocate has consistently demonstrated its ability to function effectively and independently in its current structure, housed for administrative purposes only at the Insurance Department while being funded from the Insurance Fund rather than the general fund. This independent voice for health care consumers should be preserved.