



**Testimony of Victoria Veltri, Acting State Healthcare Advocate
Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee
On SB 913
March 1, 2011**

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski, Senator Guglielmo, Representative Rigby and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. For the record, I am Victoria Veltri, the Acting State Healthcare Advocate. My office, the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA) is an independent state agency with a three-fold mission: assuring managed care consumers have access to medically necessary healthcare; educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities under health insurance plans; and, informing you of problems consumers face in accessing care and proposing solutions to those problems.

I testify today on SB 913, *To Require Employers With Fifty Or More Employees To Provide Paid Sick Leave To Certain Employees For Use For The Employee's Sickness, The Employee's Child's, Parent's Or Spouse's Sickness, Or To Deal With Sexual Assault Or Family Violence Issues*. There are unique issues around healthcare access and advocacy that the committee might wish some information on before voting on this bill.

First, it is clear that access to most healthcare providers and facilities for preventive and treatment care is only available during regular working hours, Monday-Friday. Evening and weekend care remain the solution for urgent and emergent care.

Second, we are in an era of high medical costs. The managed care surveys routinely conducted by the companies Segal and Bucks indicate that the trend in utilization of healthcare is the biggest driver in those increasing healthcare costs. And utilization of higher cost treatments particularly contribute to higher overall health costs. Higher cost treatments are usually the result of the failure or inability to obtain preventive care or first-line treatment.

Failure to obtain treatment will result in incidences of illness that, in a work environment will spread rapidly, resulting in further illness at work. During the H1N1 outbreak between September and November 2009, response, about 8 million employees took no time away from work while infected. Employees who attended work while infected with H1N1 are estimated to have caused the infection of as many as 7 million co-workers. Only 66 percent of private sector employees, took time away from work when infected

with H1N1 despite admonitions to remain home if ill, implying that many more private sector employees felt that it was necessary to attend work while ill.¹

As a result, incidences like the spread of H1N1 in 2009 add to our overall health costs in Connecticut because we are not allowing for adequate healthcare treatment and access to timely healthcare. One of the essential ingredients to controlling and containing our healthcare costs is ensuring access to healthcare when it's needed and preventing illness when at all possible.

Thank you for allowing me to comment on SB 913. If you have any questions or concerns about my testimony, please contact me at (860) 297-3982 or victoria.veltri@ct.gov.

¹ Sick at Work: Infected Employees in the Workplace During the H1N1 Pandemic, Institute for Women's Policy Research, February 2010, IWPR No. B264