



National Association of Social Workers

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Re: Opposition Testimony Regarding H - 7549, House Finance Committee

There are couple of truisms that apply to this bill. John Muir once said; ***“When we tug on a single thing in nature, we find it attached to everything else.”*** So it goes for social policy. Another truism is **that social policy is driven by values and may or may not be influenced by economics.**

With this in mind we are extremely concerned about the proposed bill H - 7549 and how it would be used by State Agencies and the Administration. Overall the National Association of Social Workers have been confounded, confused and disturbed by many of apparent goals of the present administration regarding FIP, RIteCare, and undocumented residents of Rhode Island. It is possible that H - 7549 could be used to propagate value based changes to programs that are based more on unfounded presumptions and less on addressing the budget deficit. Specific concerns we have regarding H - 7549 are as follows:

- Relating to Emergency Rule: If the current fiscal deficit met the criteria set forth in 42-35-3 and 42-35-4, that is; “an emergency situation which imperils the public safety or public health” then there would be no need for H - 7549. We strongly believe that the Executive Branch should not be granted this much power unless the above criteria is met.
- Furthermore, we believe that government and the workings there in should be as transparent as possible. A number of decisions made under the auspices of this bill could critically and negatively effect the livelihood of people receiving services that may be targeted by rule and regulation changes. Without prior knowledge or ability to speak to the changes, the affected individuals, families and advocates who work on their behalf, would not have the opportunity to add important information, data and research regarding the changes. Under the auspices of H - 7549, changes could be made to needed programs with analysis coming only from a small group of individuals without full consideration of various points of view. In essence, major changes could be made to programs without a full understanding of the impact of the changes. A perfect example of this is the recent reversal of how savings would be realized related to mental retardation group home services. The Governor’s reason for the change was because he had not previously understood the impact of the cuts on the service providers.
- The Governor’s Office has stated; { “The public vetting process occurs when the changes in the law go through the General Assembly. If for instance, the General Assembly adopts the governor’s plan

to reform Medicaid, that plan will also require some rule changes . The larger question of Medicaid reform will have been debated publicly and approved by the legislature,” Neal said.} (Providence Journal 2/22/2008) The above quote is attributed to Jeff Neal. Herein lies the problem. There are several points in which any policy may be effected in how it becomes implemented. The “general discussion of Medicaid reform” does not constitute a appropriate vetting of specific rules and regulations. This stage is often influenced by the target group of recipients, advocates and concerned public citizens. H-7549 by-passes this important phase in policy development. In my opinion, eliminating this process is not what the American Public has come to expect in the working of their Government. In addition the legislation does not specify that targeted rules and regulations have to be connected to laws that have been reviewed in the this year’s General Assembly session. It is possible that any rule or regulation within government could be changed.

We understand the difficult task legislators are face in regards to the ‘08 & ‘09 budget. Many of the elements put forth in the Governor’s budget do not save as much money in relation to the human damage the change would cost. In essence the cost to benefit ratio does not make sense. That discussion is for a future hearing.

We strongly encourage the Committee to do not pass H - 7549 out of committee.

Respectively Submitted,

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Executive Director