



## Testimony in Human Services

On March 14, 2023 on

### **H.B. No. 6665 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES.**

Good Morning Senator Lesser, Rep Gilchrist and other distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Kourosh Parham, MD, PhD. I am a Professor of Surgery at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine and an otolaryngologist practicing at UConn Health in Farmington, CT. I am the immediate past president of the CT ENT Society and the American Society of Geriatric Otolaryngology.

I am here representing approximately 800 physicians and physicians in training in Dermatology, Ophthalmology, Otolaryngology and Urology in support of Medicaid rate increases.

We want to thank this committee for raising this important human services issue and for raising the flag on just how critical this issue is for the people in Connecticut.

As you may know, Connecticut's Medicaid program serves approximately a million residents in our state, just under a quarter of Connecticut's population. Yet Medicaid recipients struggle with access to care, including primary care. This lack of access has had dire consequences.

**Unlike commercial insurance and Medicare, too few physicians and other health care providers in Connecticut accept Medicaid. The main reason for this is reimbursement.**

For primary care, including general pediatrics, the state's Medicaid program pays providers about half the rate that Medicare pays. The same is true for specialties including Dermatology, Ophthalmology, Otolaryngology and Urology.

I work in a state facility which does not limit access to Medicaid recipients and witness daily the challenges this patient population faces in securing essential care. First, while there is an ENT within 10-15 minutes of a majority of



our state's population, many Medicaid recipients have to travel over an hour from all regions of the state to see me and my colleagues in Farmington. Second, there is often a significant delay in provision of needed care before Medicaid recipients identify providers who will accept their coverage. This delay translates into more advanced disease, for example throat cancer which is more difficult and costly to treat or more emergency room visits for stopgap care of common conditions such as recurrent tonsil infections. Third, a large proportion of Medicaid recipients belong to racial minorities. This means that the small pool of Medicaid providers also contributes to disparities in health care. Numerous national studies show that Medicaid serves a racially diverse population, with 66.6% of non-elderly Medicaid enrollees identifying as Black, Latino, Asian, or mixed race. Underpaying for health care that covers a broad segment of the population is not equitable — and leads to less access, fewer choices, less culturally aligned care, and lower quality.

In conclusion, we deeply appreciate this committee's desire to help Medicaid participants, by increasing the number of providers who participate in our essential state Medicaid plan and hope this committee will consider fast tracking the rate increase for Medicaid reimbursement to mirror the 2023 Allowable Medicare rates before the end of 2024. This will ensure that Connecticut is positioned to care for the growing needs of its residents. Thank you.