



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 5, 2014**

HB 5385, An Act Concerning Language Interpreters In Hospitals

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 5385, An Act Concerning Language Interpreters In Hospitals**. CHA supports the bill as written.

Before commenting on the bill, it's important to detail the critical role hospitals play in the health and quality of life of our communities. All of our lives have, in some way, been touched by a hospital: through the birth of a child, a life saved by prompt action in an emergency room, or the compassionate end-of-life care for someone we love. Or perhaps our son, daughter, husband, wife, or friend works for, or is a volunteer at, a Connecticut hospital.

Hospitals treat everyone who comes through their doors 24 hours a day, regardless of ability to pay. In 2012, Connecticut hospitals provided nearly \$225 million in free services for those who could not afford to pay.

Connecticut hospitals are committed to initiatives that improve access to safe, equitable, high-quality care. They are ensuring that safety is reinforced as the most important focus—the foundation on which all hospital work is done. Connecticut hospitals launched the first statewide initiative in the country to become high reliability organizations, creating cultures with a relentless focus on safety and a goal to eliminate all preventable harm. This program is saving lives.

Providing culturally competent and linguistically appropriate care, eliminating health disparities, and achieving health equity are priorities of Connecticut hospitals. The CHA Diversity Collaborative, a first-in-the-nation program to address these objectives, has been recognized as a national model. The newly enhanced *National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care: A Blueprint for Advancing and Sustaining CLAS Policy and Practice*, are a tool that has driven much of the Diversity Collaborative's work.

The CLAS Standards, developed through the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, are intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate healthcare disparities. They are increasingly included in or referenced by local and national legislative, regulatory, and accreditation mandates.

The CLAS Standards support the creation of policies and require management accountability for achieving culturally appropriate objectives in hospital planning and operations. The Principal CLAS Standard guides hospitals to provide effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services. These services must be responsive to diverse cultural beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs.

The CLAS Standards include: offering language assistance to individuals who have limited English proficiency and/or other communication needs at no cost to them; facilitating timely access to all healthcare and services; informing all individuals of the availability of language assistance services clearly and in their preferred language (both verbally and in writing); ensuring the competence of individuals providing language assistance – recognizing that the use of untrained individuals and/or minors as interpreters should be avoided; and providing easy-to-understand print and multimedia materials and signage in languages commonly used by those in the service area of each of our hospitals.

The requirements of HB 5385 clearly align with the benchmarks set forth by the CLAS Standards, which are accepted and supported by the healthcare community as a whole, and in particular by Connecticut hospitals through the Diversity Collaborative.

Generations of Connecticut families have trusted Connecticut hospitals to provide care we can count on, and supporting HB 5385 is further evidence of that commitment.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.