

Hearing for Cognitive Rehabilitation bill

On July 18th, the Joint Committee on Financial Services held a hearing for the Cognitive Rehabilitation bill. At the hearing, Senator Harriette Chandler (D-Worcester) and Representative Kimberly Ferguson (R-Holden) both testified in support of the bill. Senator Chandler explained to the Committee that “cognitive rehabilitation has been demonstrated to be effective in reducing cognitive disability following brain injury and should be covered by private medical insurance.” Representative Ferguson added she felt “particularly strong about this legislation due to my background as a speech/language pathologist and someone who has personally worked with those with brain injuries”.

Executive Director Nicole Godaire highlighted the results of the report from the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA). The Financial Services Committee sent the bill to CHIA in February of 2016. CHIA issued its report this past October. The Report concluded that on average the **“more likely increase is in the range of 0.008 %” or “\$0.04” per month** for commercial health insurance.

Afterwards, a panel of medical professionals testified in support of the bill.

Dr. Mel Glenn, Director of Outpatient and Community Brain Injury Rehabilitation, Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, explained “over the past 19 years, considerable evidence from controlled studies has emerged demonstrating the benefit of cognitive rehabilitation.”

Dr. Therese O’Neil-Pirozzi, a speech-language pathologist who specializes in cognitive rehabilitation of individuals following brain injury, asserted that “with less need for supervision/care post-acute rehabilitation, the upfront cost of providing cognitive rehabilitation is less than the long-term cost of providing a greater level of supervision/care without it.”

Dr. Ariel Savitz, who formally worked in Texas, hypothetically showed that an individual “not only had the misfortune of having an aneurysm, she had the misfortune of having an aneurysm in Massachusetts. Had Jane had her aneurysm in Texas, the 2007 legislature would have covered her for up to 6 months of post-acute care.” Texas is the only state that requires commercial health insurance plans to cover cognitive rehabilitation for a brain injuries.

Beth Adams, a Neurotrauma Rehabilitation Specialist, testified that “a former patient felt like a nicely wrapped package on the outside because she looked “fine” but an empty package on the inside as she could not remember many things on her own and desperately needed cognitive rehab but was unable to afford it privately.”

Three brain injury survivors/family members also spoke before the Committee.

Chris Waible’s husband, Fred, suffered his brain injury from a car collision, and she began her testimony by stating, “I think it is ludicrous that Massachusetts health insurance companies are willing to pay to restore a broken body back to its maximum potential but are not required to spend one cent to rehabilitate an injured brain which is the most complex organ in our bodies...”

Sandra Madden, who has lived with the consequences of traumatic brain injury for the last eleven years, stated “what a blessing it would be to have relief from the cognitive issues that plague me every day, from having a thought that escapes me in a single second and cannot be retrieved.”

Ryan Farrell, injured in a cheerleading accident her freshman year at Marist College, did receive cognitive rehabilitation paid for by her family. This therapy enabled her to go back to school and graduate.

BIA-MA now awaits the Financial Service Committee to issue a favorable report on the bill, hopefully this fall. For those that did not contact the members of the Committee to share your personal story and support, you can still email the co-chairs, Senator Jamie Eldridge at James.Eldridge@masenate.gov and Representative Aaron Michlewitz at Aaron.M.Michlewitz@mahouse.gov. Once receiving a favorable report, it is expected the bill will be sent to the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing. We will keep the brain injury community up to date on the bill’s progress and how you can continue advocating for its passage