



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 956: An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status

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Chairs and members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 956: An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status. I am Rosana G. Ferraro and am the Policy and Program Officer at Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut.

At Universal Health Care our mission is to serve as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a democratic health system that provides universal access to quality, affordable, equitable health care and promotes health in Connecticut. We believe that health care is a fundamental right and that our work is part of a broader movement for social and economic justice.

We support this bill because when we say universal, we mean everybody – everyone should have access to quality, affordable, equitable health care, regardless of immigration status. We all need access to affordable care and coverage, especially now during a pandemic. When we say all immigrants should be covered under HUSKY (Medicaid and CHIP) programs, we also include all who are currently excluded – undocumented immigrants and adults who have been here less than five years.

In our work, we collect health care stories. We have heard the story of a middle-aged undocumented Hispanic man from Meriden. When asked about his main health care concerns, he spoke about his worry that he would only be able to receive medical attention if his life is at risk. He lives in fear that he might develop a sickness that can become more severe with time because he lacks health care access and coverage. This is cruel, but a reality for many undocumented immigrants.

Current policy dictates that someone must be treated at an emergency room if their life is in danger – regardless of immigration status. However, in the end, those undocumented and without insurance end up with expensive bills and without the ability to afford crucial follow up care. Often, these severe situations could have been avoided with preventive care – but again, those undocumented without insurance do not have access to critical preventive care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the health disparities that we have always known were present in our health care system. Black and brown communities are hit hardest by the pandemic – for a variety of reasons, including Black and brown people

being disproportionately in “essential” front line jobs and disproportionately suffering from conditions that can worsen COVID-19 infection.

The severity of the pandemic prompted Connecticut to ensure that COVID-19 testing and treatment (and eventually vaccines) were free and available to all, regardless of status, using emergency Medicaid funds for this purpose, for those who were uninsured. This demonstrates that the state understands that cost is a barrier to testing and treatment and that the health of some of us affects us all. But despite the state’s best intentions, providing emergency Medicaid for only COVID testing and treatment is only a half-measure to ensure the health of all.

The COVID-19 crisis is a wake-up call for our health care system to change. It’s time we start to think differently regarding health care and move towards keeping all Americans healthy – documented or not. All people, regardless of immigration status, are part of the fabric of Connecticut. Without access to health care for the undocumented, we risk the lives of members of our communities who are vital components of our daily lives.

Medicaid coverage for all who are income eligible, regardless of status, would help combat health disparities. The undocumented population in Connecticut had a 52% uninsured rate (in 2018), according to the [Migration Policy Institute](#). Comparatively, Connecticut had a 6.3% uninsured rate overall (in 2018), according to [Kaiser Family Foundation](#). There is a substantial disparity in the uninsured rate. Expanding HUSKY programs to all, regardless of immigration status, would help to address this disparity and bring us a step closer to health equity.

HUSKY programs are the most appropriate way to cover low-income undocumented families. For years, HUSKY (Medicaid and CHIP) has worked efficiently and effectively, providing low-income families access to medical, behavioral health, dental and vision coverage with no cost sharing. This lack of cost sharing is critical to access because low-income families do not have the financial resources to afford health care coverage otherwise.

Not only is Medicaid affordable, it also does a good job of serving its members. [Department of Social Services](#) points out that Medicaid has improved health outcomes for members. Medicaid enrollment can increase utilization of preventive care services, reduce hospital admissions, and decrease the length of a hospital stay. Using primary care services allows for earlier diagnosis of conditions like diabetes and allows for better management of chronic diseases. Medicaid also has a positive effect on mental health.

As the [National Immigration Law Center](#) has found, other states have provided coverage for certain undocumented immigrants, displaying commitment to health for all. Both our neighboring states, New York and Massachusetts, offer health care services to all children regardless of immigration status. Just this year, Illinois decided to cover adults 65 and older, regardless of immigration status, with public insurance. California covers all immigrants, regardless of status, up to age 26 in their Medicaid program, known as Medi-Cal. Connecticut can lead the nation in covering all immigrants, regardless of status, through our HUSKY (Medicaid and CHIP) programs.

By supporting the expansion of HUSKY (Medicaid and CHIP) for undocumented immigrants regardless of immigration status, Connecticut can take one step closer to universal health care. With this expansion, we can offer affordable and accessible options to the low-income uninsured and undocumented population of Connecticut.

Like we said before, Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut believes that health care is a human right. Universal means everybody. Granting people access to health care regardless of status begins to address issues of social inequality faced by marginalized and minority communities. This expansion would create positive changes in overall health of Connecticut residents and the health of our families. Please support this important legislation – it is not only the right thing to do, but the only way forward.

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