

Ruben Zapata
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Good Afternoon. My name is Ruben Zapata and I am a Board Member of the Naugatuck Valley Project and a member of Sacred Heart/Sagrado Corazon Church, which is a member of the Naugatuck Valley Project in Waterbury. As far back as I can remember, I have interpreted for my parents who came from Puerto Rico and who still do not speak English well. To this day I interpret for my parents, and for other family members and friends.

My Stepfather, a native of Puerto Rico, lives in Waterbury and he had a very serious accident as a child that deteriorated into a chronic ulcer of his foot. Because he speaks limited English, I have to interpret each time he goes to have his ulcer treated. If I hadn't gone and spoken for him, he would not have gone at all but would be improperly treating his ulcer himself with a straight razor. Because I was able to interpret for him he was able to obtain the proper health care he deserves.

As a young boy, I often had to accompany one of my parents, if they needed health care. I remember how difficult and embarrassing it was to go and interpret for an adult. Needless to say I not only lost time from school as a child, but was often trying to interpret words that I did not understand myself. Now, as an adult I've found myself interpreting for complete strangers I meet in the emergency room. To see the faces of people who are in pain and who can't communicate to a doctor or nurse makes me sad. If only there were someone who could help. I've seen people come to emergency rooms who speak English and get medical attention before the Limited English Proficient or LEP person, even though the LEP person was there first. It is like the medical staff is saying "since you don't speak English, you'll have to wait for an interpreter or bilingual person to show up so we can speak to you." This seems so unethical, cruel and humiliation.

Today we are faced with a growing immigrant population, struggling to explain to a medical professional what ails them. If proper interpretation is not readily available, a doctor may prescribe medication that actually makes worse or just tell the LEP patient to take aspirin and call if the symptoms, which they were not able to describe in the first place, get worse. Whatever the case, the patient may not be getting the proper care and can possibly die or inadvertently spread disease. I have heard many stories of miscarriages, diabetic attacks or even death because no one is providing the necessary medical interpretation. This can be prevented. Bishop Peter Rosazza of the Archdiocese of Hartford spoke last spring about a child who died needlessly because her parents could not speak English. We all deserve the best medical care without having to worry about language barriers. Medical interpretation should not be a privilege, it is a necessity. It is a serious health issue. We must not assume that a janitor or a receptionist is going to interpret for an LEP person.

Ladies and Gentlemen I implore you to please pass this legislation and fund the medical interpretation provision in the DSS budget. Doing so will give everyone a voice and guarantee proper health care for those who now don't that voice or health care.

Thank you,