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Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address your Committee today. My name is Erica Iyamu-Osagie and I am a student at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work. I wish to indicate my strong opposition to the proposed elimination of funding for medical interpreters under Medicaid.

There are many people living in Connecticut who are disadvantaged due to the language gap between themselves and their doctors. I would like to share a story that I was told by one of my co-worker. My co-worker shared that one of her clients wants to have a better relationship with her doctor and the reason why she does not trust their relationship is due to the lack of communication. Her client told her a story about when she had some pain in her left hand, which she thought to be tuberculosis. On her next doctor's appointment there was confusion regarding her current medication. She was then assigned to a random interpreter, a Spanish speaking staff member. The interpreter informed her that her doctor was under the impression that she was already on medication to treat the tuberculosis. The interpreter informed her that she did not have tuberculosis but when she returned to the doctor they asked her, again, if she was taking medication for tuberculosis. The client also informed her worker that she has taken multiple blood tests for the same reason due to the lack of communication between herself and her doctor. This type of confusion will be eliminated if trained interpreters are able to bridge the gap between doctor and patient. Because of this client's experiences, she feels unsure about the reality of her health. Her doctors have made so many mistakes in terms of telling her the status of her health and properly explaining her medications.

In my everyday life, I do not have to deal with the frustrations of not being able to understand a doctor because I am able to speak English. I compare the frustrations of non-English speaking people to my experiences that I had overseas, while studying abroad in college. When I was in Greece, I often encountered many situations when I urgently needed to know Greek and I was unable to communicate with people. I had to deal with these frustrations for only a few months. I can not begin to imagine how people are forced deal with this barrier for a longer period of time, especially with doctors. We are taught to believe that doctors have the power to help us and relieve us from our ills, but how can doctors help their patients when there is a barrier between them? This is the reality for thousands of people throughout our state and it is not fair that vital services are disrupted or misunderstood because of simple language barriers.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any question that you may have.