

Dear Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Chelsea Connery I am a former educator in Hartford Public Schools and current PhD student in Leadership and Education Policy at the University of Connecticut from New Haven, CT. I stand in support of HB5251- An Act Establishing A Task Force to Study Health Insurance Coverage for Undocumented Immigrants in this State. I was born and raised in Connecticut. With the encouragement of my father, a UConn alum, I was lucky enough to complete my bachelor's and master's degrees there as well. I then taught for 3 years in Hartford Public Schools before accepting an opportunity to pursue my PhD in Leadership and Education Policy at UConn. My research focuses include using organizational and institutional lenses to study policy impact on equity and access to quality education, specifically among immigrant and undocumented student populations.

I have been personally privileged with access to health care and insurance the majority of my life. I am currently one of the very fortunate graduate students in our state with access to private insurance through my employment as a research assistant. Indeed, living with a chronic illness, I would not have been able to pursue such a degree if it were not for this benefit. However, the lack of quality, affordable coverage has shaped my life immensely. My husband, then boyfriend, recently decided to make a career change. In this pursuit he began a new job but did not have access to health care through his employer and could not afford insurance. He would avoid going to the doctor when sick. He was regularly in pain, unable to continue physical therapy he needed from breaking his back a few years prior. While we always saw marriage in our future, this unsustainable burden inaccessible health care coverage was a significant reason behind our decision to get married.

Moreover, the lack of quality, affordable coverage worried me deeply as an educator in a district with a large immigrant population. I had students whose meaningful learning was hindered by their inability to access care and/or insurance. Sometimes small health issues would snowball into circumstances that preventative care would have surely warded off. In these cases, students would often miss several days of school. Other times students would end up hospitalized due to their inability to access treatment. For example, a student with asthma who could not afford a maintenance inhaler. It was these bigger structural issues of inequity impeding the educational access, opportunity, and success of my bright, funny, hard-working, and motivated, students that led me to pursue policy solutions. In particular I am writing in support of the undocumented immigrant youth and community I continue to work with in a variety of capacities. These individualized are systematically marginalized, if we have the power to alleviate some of this inequity, we have a moral obligation to do so.

Creating a taskforce is important because it will provide a means to research-based solutions to how our state can increase access to health care coverage for undocumented immigrants. Specifically, the taskforce should study the issue of health care access for undocumented immigrants and other immigrant groups ineligible for HUSKY or other forms of health care coverage in Connecticut. It is also important to research and analyze the cost of expanding HUSKY A, B, C, and D coverage for all immigrants, regardless of status and duration of residency. Moreover, it is imperative the taskforce meaningfully incorporates immigrant community voices. This can be ensured by including, at least, a representative from an immigrant rights advocacy organization (i.e., CT Immigrant Rights Alliance, Make the Road CT, and/or CT Students for a Dream) and a representative from a health care advocacy organization

(i.e., Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, CT Voices for Children, Universal Health Care Foundation, Health Equity Solutions).

This bill is a positive and necessary plan to shape the network of institutions that impact the education system. Access to health care is a human right and no person should be denied or face obstacles to necessary health care due to the inability to pay or their immigration status. Such moves towards upholding the human rights of immigrant communities give me hope for the future of our state. However, if a moral argument doesn't speak to you, consider the fact that undocumented immigrants in our state pay approximately 145 million dollars into state and local taxes each year – money that funds state health care programs that they themselves are unable to access due to their status. As taxpayers funding state health programs, undocumented residents deserve an equal and fair opportunity to access the very programs they fund. Overall, this is a common-sense bill for Connecticut. We must do right by our community members. I urge the committee to make sure that you make this Public Option as inclusive as possible, and available to all CT's residents regardless of immigration status.

I support HB5251 and hope the committee will vote favorably.

Thank you for your time,
Chelsea Connery
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