

Position: **Support with modification**

To the Committee,

I am writing to support the proposed Task Force to study Health Insurance for residents of Connecticut who are immigrants.

I would urge you to ensure that the final language covers exploration of health insurance for all Connecticut residents who would be eligible for health insurance through a Connecticut program if not for their immigration status (this includes undocumented immigrants, but also other immigrant groups who are low-income and documented but still not eligible under current program rules).

Since leaving my 30+ year career at Connecticut Legal Services, I have been volunteering with Make The Road in Bridgeport Connecticut. At Make The Road meetings, I have the chance to talk to many immigrants to Connecticut, who come from many countries. Some are undocumented, some have claims pending with USCIS (federal immigration), often for years; others have a form of legal status, and others are now citizens of the United States. All of the people I have met have fled terrible situations in their country of origin, and they are hard-working family-focused people. They are the kind of people who have always built the American economy and our multicultural communities. But under current policies, many of them cannot access health care.

The toll of our complicated and sometimes restrictive healthcare system cannot be overstated. Obviously there is a toll on individuals who cannot get treatment until it requires a trip to the emergency room – in other words, often they cannot get care until it is too late. There is a secondary toll on their families (and many of these families include children who are U.S. citizens and are part of our state's future) – having parents who cannot get health care and who suffer as a result causes trauma to the entire family.

There is a toll on our economy, because people who want to work cannot do so when they are sick and cannot get treatment.

And the significant number of Connecticut residents who need treatment and don't have insurance takes a toll on our health care system – because the emergency room care that eventually results is expensive and inefficient compared to ongoing preventive care and treatment.

Expanding health care access always has some costs and many benefits. It is a first step, at least, to pass this bill to establish a Task Force so that the issues can be fully explored, and reported back to this legislature.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Steve Eppler-Epstein*

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