

TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY JOANNE LEWIS IN FAVOR OF

HB 5251 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR
UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS IN THIS STATE.

I am an attorney at Connecticut Legal Services, Inc. I have represented clients seeking government benefits, including medical insurance, for many years. Currently my primary clientele consists of immigrant children and immigrant survivors of domestic violence or other crimes. As such, I write on behalf of Connecticut Legal Services in support of the legislation to create the proposed task force. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. Unfortunately, I cannot attend the hearing in person.

The current language of HB5251 is too narrow. There are documented (legal) immigrants who lack access to health insurance. These include immigrants who have been permanent residents for fewer than five years, children who hold Special Immigrant Juvenile status, U visa holders, or those in deferred action, such as DACA recipients and domestic violence survivors who are waiting for a permanent visa to become available. We support medical coverage for all in Connecticut, including all immigrants. Access to healthcare is a necessary foundation of healthy development for children, and of productivity of adults.

Many of my immigrant clients work and contribute to the state and federal tax coffers, yet are unable to qualify for state and federal medical programs or health care insurance subsidies. This is unfair to the affected individuals, and also poses broader public health concerns. It can also make it more difficult to prove their cases, since they lack necessary medical evidence.

People who lack medical coverage forestall or forgo needed preventive treatment. They also lack access to screening procedures that could identify serious illnesses early, when they are more treatable. The result is costly, emergency medical care. We all bear these costs. We also all bear the cost of reduced productivity in the workforce and the tragic waste of avoidable harm to developing children who do not get needed medical care.

Connecticut, commendably, has been a leader in fights for fair treatment to immigrants. We have also expanded medical coverage to help ensure the productivity of our residents. It is important to extend that coverage to all of the state's residents.