



Connecticut Legal Services



NEW HAVEN
LEGAL
ASSISTANCE
ASSOCIATION, INC.

Insurance Committee, February 25, 2020

Testimony submitted by Alison Weir, Policy Advocate and Attorney
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HB 5251 and SB 201: Support Task Forces to Study Immigrant Health Care and Health Equity

My name is Alison Weir, and I am a policy advocate and staff attorney with Greater Hartford Legal Aid (GHLA). On behalf of GHLA, Connecticut Legal Services, and New Haven Legal Assistance I support HB5251, the bill to establish a task force to study health insurance coverage of undocumented immigrants in the state and SB 201, the bill to establish a task force to study health insurance and health equity in the state. GHLA supports efforts to provide our clients full access to health care, and establishing task forces to study the current barriers to health care for immigrants and the obstacles that have prevented health care equity for the diverse populations of this state is a significant step in helping achieve that goal and in supporting the health of state residents as a whole.

HB5251

Our immigrant population is particularly at risk of negative health outcomes due to a lack of access to health insurance. Undocumented immigrants represent a large percentage of the uninsured population in Connecticut. They are not eligible to buy insurance on AccessCT Exchange and they cannot participate in HUSKY programs. Undocumented immigrants pay taxes to the state and federal governments, but they are barred from many of the benefits available to citizens, such as assistance with affordable health care. But even documented immigrants face barriers to HUSKY access. Although green card holders may participate in HUSKY health care coverage, they cannot for the first five years after receiving their green card. So individuals who have been fully approved to live as legal residents are not approved for health care coverage as they are establishing their lives as legal residents.

The state as a whole benefits when more people are insured and able to access health care. People who are uninsured do not seek treatment when they are ill, do not receive screening procedures which could identify serious medical conditions early when they are treatable, and are less likely to bring their children to the doctor, even then the child is insured. The result is lost productivity, expensive emergency medical costs, and increased risk of the spread of disease. Addressing health care coverage for Connecticut's undocumented immigrant population and those who are documented but otherwise barred from HUSKY could significantly reduce the uninsured population of the state, which would serve to improve the public and economic health of the state.

SB201

I also urge the committee to support SB 201, establishing a task force to address health equity in the state. Connecticut is one of the most affluent states in the country and ranks highly on national measures of health, but we have significant disparities in health care access and outcomes across the ethnic, racial, and other population groups that contribute to the diversity of Connecticut's population. The state took a first step in addressing these disparities with the establishment of the Office of Health Equity in the Department of Public Health, but it is clear the time has come to do more. Data collection is uneven, but what data have been collected depict troubling disparities. For example, infant mortality among black and Latinx residents is three and two times higher respectively than among white residents, and black residents are twice as likely to die from diabetes as white residents. A task force could focus attention on the issue and study the most effective ways to collect the necessary data to fully understand the sources of the disparities and identify how best to eliminate disparities and ensure that Connecticut is a healthy place to live for all our residents.