

March 11, 2021

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Angela Bellas. I am a PhD Candidate at the UConn School of Social Work and a member of CT Mutual Aid: East of the River and Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community. I live in Manchester. I stand in support of S.B. No. 956: "AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS," with clear language that extends eligibility to all HUSKY programs to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status because healthcare is a human right.

I currently have healthcare coverage as a Graduate Assistant at UConn, but I lived without health insurance for years and during these years, I didn't have a PCP, I didn't go to a dentist for a decade, I didn't seek medical advice when I was ill because I couldn't afford to. This is not a unique story. It is well documented that uninsured individuals are less likely to seek medical care until it is urgent, and therefore more dangerous and more costly.

I am also the daughter of an immigrant. My father left his village in Greece and came to the U.S. to settle in Massachusetts just before his 19th birthday. When I was a teenager my father became very ill and he went to see a doctor for the first time in decades. He was eventually diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. My father struggled through rounds of chemotherapy and radiation treatments and eventually kidney failure. When I think about these years, and all of the pain and suffering my father experienced first with cancer, then after his first heart attack, and later in life with chronic kidney disease, another heart attack and finally years of dialysis- I am so grateful for the healthcare- for the oncologist, the cardiologists, the nephrologists, the interventional radiologists, the nurses, dialysis techs, the social workers, the phlebotomists (even if my father did hate needles with a passion), the surgical technologists, the medical assistants, the patient care technicians and the medical technology that extended my father's life for 25 years beyond his initial cancer diagnosis. My 6-year old daughter only got to know her papou because of the healthcare and interventions he received through multiple organ failures. My father died in 2018 after years of suffering- he was on dialysis for four hours/three times a week for the last few years of his life and he hated it. He hated the needles. He hated what he called the dark thoughts he had on dialysis days. He hated all the times his fistula stopped working and he needed to have it re-inflated. But he loved his family. He loved life. He loved my daughter, his koukla, with all his heart and he wanted every month, every week, every day, every hour he could have with her- that he could have with us.

Do you have any idea how much dialysis costs out of pocket? How much 10 days in the hospital costs? Most of us can't dream of being able to pay the \$100,000+ hospital bill out of pocket, or for a year of dialysis. The additional stress of crushing medical bills while dealing with life or death medical issues only further exacerbates human suffering and racial health disparities. I am testifying today because my father had access to quality healthcare that saved

his life, extended his life, improved his quality of life for years, and I know that EVERYONE should have access to preventative and life-saving healthcare, regardless of immigration status.

Our immigration system is grounded in white supremacy. My father's story is very different because he happened to be born in a European country and the U.S. quota system for immigration has over-privileged white, European immigrants migrating for the same reasons anyone migrates-for economic opportunity, to escape the violence of poverty, to escape the violence of war and civil conflict, for love. It is long overdue that Connecticut ensures that our immigrant friends and neighbors- the same essential workers holding up our economy and food systems through a global pandemic- have access to the same preventative and life-saving healthcare that my father was afforded. While I strongly believe we need true universal healthcare, SB 956 is a step in the right direction.

I am also speaking today as a member of CT Mutual Aid: East of the River and Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community, because many of my friends are not able to take this time away from work or family obligations to speak to you; and many are scared or intimidated by this process for a variety of reasons. I am here in support of S.B. 956 because some of my friends are undocumented or were undocumented at some point in their lives. Some of my friends have experienced medical emergencies or are struggling with chronic health issues, and they don't have access to healthcare. And some of my friends have shared their bills from emergency room visits, panicking after receiving a \$10,000 bill. I am here for and with those friends today because health care is a human right, and we need to codify access to health care coverage- to HUSKY- regardless of immigration status.

I support S.B. No 956, with clear language to extend current HUSKY eligibility rules to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status, and I ask the committee to support this legislation.

Sincerely,

Angela Bellas, MSW
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