

Testimony in **SUPPORT** of S.B. No. 956: “AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS”

March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Dr. Tanner Bommersbach, I am a physician working across New Haven County.

I stand in support of SB 956 but with modifications. SB 956 currently leaves out low-income parents and children under HUSKY A and low-income elderly folks under HUSKY C. I support modifying SB 956 to include ALL CT residents that qualify under the current HUSKY eligibility.

I work as a psychiatrist in a public clinic for children and young adults with psychiatric disorders. Every day, I care for undocumented individuals who have overcome unimaginable challenges early in their lives and have managed to contribute to their communities in inspiring ways. Yet, these children and young adults are unable to access affordable healthcare due to their immigration status. As their doctor, I struggle to get them necessary health services, including preventive primary care visits, medications to treat their psychiatric conditions, nursing care, and referrals to specialists.

One college student I work with who is undocumented has a serious condition that causes her to experience seizure-like episodes multiple times a day. For the last year, she has not been able to see a neurologist to diagnose these episodes due to her undocumented status. These episodes have significantly impacted her school studies, her job opportunities, and staying involved in her church, which is her favorite activity. Last month, after struggling with these seizure-like episodes for several years without appropriate medical care, she had to take a leave of absence from her college classes. I believe that if she had health insurance and was able to see a neurologist for her condition, she would be able to continue college and achieve her goal of becoming a social worker to help other young adults facing similar challenges.

I struggle knowing that while my undocumented patients have the right to go to school in CT, they do not have the right to basic health and healthcare in CT. Today, I am urging you to join six other states, including our neighbors in Massachusetts and New York, to pass SB 956 with modifications, to expand access to Husky for all CT residents who qualify, regardless of immigration status.

Passing this bill is not only the right thing to do, I also believe it makes financial sense for our state. According to an analysis conducted by the Connecticut Health Foundation and Georgetown University, expanding HUSKY A and B to undocumented children in CT is estimated to cost \$11.3 million for year one and \$13.9 million for year two, for a total of \$25.3 million over the biennium. Ensuring medical care to all children reduces expensive, uncompensated emergency care, prevents future costly medical complications, and has significant long-term impact, including improved academic success, high school graduation rates, and future job prospects. In 2017 alone, Connecticut hospitals provided \$1.66 billion in unreimbursed and uncompensated care, similar to the expensive care provided to many of my patients who are undocumented every time they go to the emergency room because it's the only way they can get life-saving care.

I realize that passing this bill in the midst of our state's budget deficit is a difficult ask, but it is an investment that will result in a healthier and more productive CT for years to come. For all of these reasons, I support SB 956 with the modifications above, and hope the committee will make these changes.

Thank you for your time.

Tanner Bommersbach, MD MPH