

SB 956 – AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS

Written testimony from Nancy Bowden, Bloomfield CT

I write in support of SB 956 which, while it falls short of full healthcare for all members of our local immigrant community, is nevertheless a bill that fills a critical need. By now we are all well aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the truth of the wealth, education and healthcare gaps that have been festering in this state. It is vital that we remember that these forms of human injustice will not go away once the pandemic has subsided.

I was raised in a family of U. S. – born citizens, Caucasians with all the benefits of the G.I. bill and other educational and economic access. I have always had the healthcare I needed, and for my entire adult life, good health insurance (now Medicare). I do not know how it feels to lack money for a doctor or to hope that my serious symptoms go away, or worse, to be afraid to go to a doctor or clinic. If I dragged myself to work while feeling sick, it was from stubbornness, not desperation to earn a living. My guess is that most of you on this committee have lived that same sort of life.

Over the past few years I have had a true learning experience through attending anti-deportation rallies and by joining in the support of recent immigrants, both undocumented and documented. I can say without hesitation that these are individuals and families who persevere in their quest to survive and occasionally thrive in often unwelcoming communities. Especially for the undocumented, many of whom are caught in expensive bureaucratic mazes of our citizenship laws, life is defined by multiple menial jobs patched together tenuously in order to cover rents for substandard housing in often dangerous areas, while encouraging their children to stick with studies and aim for something better for their own lives. Most of us do not know this level of sacrifice.

The employment they find, often unstable and with grueling shift requirements, is low paid and most often comes without any medical benefits. In general, during this pandemic, they were either jobs that disappeared (such as restaurants or custodial in buildings now largely shuttered) or were the much-touted “essential” positions relating to public transportation, shipping, shelf stocking, or cleaning in vital operations such as hospitals, nursing homes and grocery stores.

It seems obvious that, during a pandemic, we owe equal protection to those who keep us “safe”. It is unamerican to ask one “class” of folks to sacrifice on an ongoing basis for another “class”, although we do this often. But beyond the pandemic, and indeed because there is good reason to expect that this is not the last pandemic we will face in the years ahead, we as a state are called to provide equal access to healthcare to every human being who calls Connecticut home. It is time to stop talking about the “wealth gap” in the state and start addressing it head-on. This is one major step toward that goal.