

Dear members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is William Coe. I am a second-year psychiatry resident at Yale New Haven Hospital.

I am writing today in support of SB 956: AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS, but with modifications. As it is currently written, SB 956 leaves out a significant portion of our immigrant community, including low-income individuals, parents, elderly individuals, and people with disabilities. I support modifying SB 956 to include ALL Connecticut residents who qualify under the existing HUSKY income requirements, regardless of their immigration status.

As a medical student and resident, I have had the opportunity to care for many undocumented individuals, two of whom I will never forget. They were similar in many ways: both young men, in their 30s, moved to the States from Central America in the hopes of a better life. They were caretakers, beloved uncles, soccer coaches – but now living on borrowed time with a liver that was quickly failing them. Have you ever seen someone with end-stage liver disease? It's a horrifying condition. These men were bruised and jaundiced, floating in and out of consciousness, wasting away with pregnant bellies swollen with fluid.

Most people are able to access our health care system before their liver disease progresses to this point. But these two men, undocumented and uninsured, were forced to come in now after it was too late. The only available treatment option at this point was liver transplant, but neither were eligible – again because of their undocumented and uninsured status. In the end, our team had to discharge both of these men home on hospice to die.

As a doctor, I have the honor and privilege of witnessing firsthand how our health care system has the ability to save lives and accomplish feats that were once unimaginable. I also have the responsibility of knowing how and when our system falls short, time and time again, and trying my best to stand up and do something about it. This is one of those times! The inevitable and painful death of these two young men was completely preventable, but because of the way our society has chosen to treat certain individuals, we – as their treatment team – were barred from doing all that we could to help.

I support SB 956 with modifications (and HB 6334 as written) because it's the right thing to do. Expanding HUSKY to ALL who qualify will allow the immigrant community to engage with our health care system before it's too late. It will also allow providers the freedom to do what they are trained to do: save lives. I hope the committee will vote favorably.

Thank you for your time,
William Coe, MD, MPH