

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

My name is Chelsea Connery, I am from New Haven, Connecticut. I am a former public-school teacher and currently a full-time doctoral candidate in Leadership and Education Policy at the University of Connecticut. I stand in support of S.B. 956: An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status, that expands eligibility to all HUSKY programs to all Connecticut residents, regardless of immigration status.

The issue of health insurance access is deeply personal to me. I am currently one of the very fortunate graduate students in our state with access to insurance through my employment as a research assistant. Indeed, living with a chronic illness, I would not have been able to pursue such a degree if it were not for this benefit. However, the lack of quality, affordable coverage has shaped my life immensely. A couple years back, my husband, then boyfriend, decided to make a career change. In this pursuit he began a new job but did not have access to health care through his employer and could not afford insurance. He would avoid going to the doctor when sick. He was regularly in pain, unable to continue physical therapy he needed from breaking his back a few years prior. While we always saw marriage in our future, the unsustainable burden of inaccessible health care coverage was a significant reason behind our decision to get married. Knowing I will soon complete my PhD program is both exciting and daunting – the latter simply because I worry putting my family’s access to quality, affordable health insurance at risk. Nonetheless I recognize the privilege I have to seek health insurance through other means if necessary.

In addition to my work in academia I am a member of a community organization, Semilla Collective, which is also a member organization of the Husky 4 Immigrants Coalition. As part of this campaign, the Collective worked in solidarity, calling our community members, hearing their stories, and supporting the development of their formal testimonies. My own story I shared above pales in comparison to the stories of my friends and community members who have been shut out of the system all together. This is a longstanding issue that our state has the ability to ameliorate – I am done being polite, health care should be a human right. The first bill proposed in Connecticut to expand eligibility for HUSKY programs to all residents, regardless of immigration status was proposed in 2019. This is at least the third time since then I have shared testimony in support of similar bills, so I know it has been more frequent than that that legislators have heard the stories of our community members who are truly suffering at the hands of, at best, ineffective and, at worst, cruel and inhumane policies. The legislature’s choice to deny health care to portions of our population is dehumanizing and has directly led to preventable illness, injury, and death.

Adding insult to injury, undocumented immigrants in Connecticut pay taxes that fund the health care of others. That is, undocumented immigrants in Connecticut pay around 145 million dollars into state and local taxes annually¹ – taxes which are then appropriated to fund the HUSKY program. Yet, despite these contributions, the eligibility requirements of HUSKY are preventing many from accessing adequate coverage – these tens of thousands of families and individuals then cannot receive the proper care and treatment they deserve without risking further economic

¹ “The Contributions of New Americans in Connecticut.” New American Economy Research Fund, n.d. <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/the-contributions-of-new-americans-in-connecticut/>

insecurity and debt. Even outside of the context of a global pandemic this is a huge public health concern. Expanding HUSKY eligibility to be inclusive of all Connecticut residents regardless of immigration status will help equalize access to health care coverage and reduce the state's uninsured rate.

We have the power to help these families, we have the power to make a difference. I urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to support S.B. 956 this session to expand high-quality, dependable, and affordable health care by creating new public options for health insurance.

Thank you for your time,

Chelsea Connery

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