

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

My name is Liz Demsky, I am from New Haven. I serve as a School Counselor for New Haven Public Schools and on the Board of Directors for CT Students for Dream.. 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.

In my unique position, I work with essentially all Newcomers to the United States, who arrive in New Haven, that are high school age. Many of these students are undocumented. Beyond this specific population, my caseload also includes a multitude of immigrant and low-income students. As a School Counselor, it is my goal to help students be academically successful and remain on track for graduation within four years. In doing so, I help students overcome barriers to their success. These include addressing social-emotional issues and general academic struggles. However, when students are not getting basic needs met, it makes my job very difficult and almost impossible. Being healthy falls under that umbrella of basic needs. A student had a tooth infection, another had trouble reading the words on the board, so many need intensive counseling for the traumas they have experienced. However, they are undocumented and therefore uninsured. These challenges have in turn led to these students having higher absences and lower grades. This makes it harder for them to catch up. In some instances, they end up dropping out. In other cases, students become ineligible for scholarships due to attendance issues. New Haven is already up against a struggling graduation rate and low college enrollment numbers.

As I mentioned before, being healthy is a basic need and then so is healthcare. Students should have all the essentials for remaining healthy. Food, shelter, and healthcare in order to treat and prevent future issues all go hand in hand. Students already have so much to deal with during high school, having an untreated fever, infection, or broken bone should not be something else to add to this list. The same goes for parents of students, as the same issues abound when a student has to care for a sick parent. Caring for a sick parent is even more complicated when they cannot access treatment. We cannot continue discriminating against this population. The implications are far reaching. The vast majority of these families are extremely hard working and therefore contribute to state and local taxes. However, they are unable to access the state healthcare programs they contribute to due to their status. They deserve to use the programs they are funding. We have the ability to help these families. Let's make a difference and move in the right direction.

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.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Liz

Liz Demsky
School Counselor
New Haven Public Schools