

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

My name is Imelda Diaz, and I write on behalf of Hartford Deportation Defense (HDD), an immigrant-led immigrant rights group based in Hartford with members and leaders coming from many countries and life experiences. HDD stands 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.

Hartford Deportation Defense is a mutual aid group made up of mothers, fathers, youth, neighbors, immigrants, and non-immigrants alike that all join together in mutual support of each other and in fighting for a more just society. We envision a world where all of our families can live with dignity and respect without the fear of deportation hanging over their heads, where all of us are free to move, live, and thrive in the communities that we want to live in and where all of us have access to the resources that we need regardless of our immigration status.

Unfortunately, one of the biggest barriers that prevents our members from being able to live in this world we described is our lack of access to quality healthcare. You will hear many of our members testify today, sharing their stories and speaking their truth about how the healthcare system has failed them. You will hear about parents that are afraid that their kids will get sick and they won't be able to afford the care. You will hear about workers getting injured on the job and using up everything they have saved to pay for medical bills and just to return to the same dangerous labor conditions. You will hear from community members with chronic conditions that have not been able to get proper treatment and suffer emergencies that did not have to happen. You will hear about the constant stress, the anxiety, the fear, the trauma, much of it because undocumented immigrants are not able to access health insurance in the state of Connecticut.

Many of our members that are testifying are parents. In their stories, you will hear them always talk about the health of their children first. You will hear them set aside their own health in order to make sure their children get the support that they need. We know that parents are willing to do anything for their children. However, that sentiment should not include suffering every day, worrying every day simply because our government prevents them from accessing the health care that they deserve. Parents deserve quality care, single adults deserve quality care, children deserve quality care, everyone in our community deserves quality care. That is why we are advocating strongly for this bill to pass and include clear language that these benefits should extend to everyone in all of the HUSKY programs.

Having one accident or suffering from a chronic condition should not mean that you have to go into thousands of dollars of medical debt. Due to the lack of health insurance access of our members, we as an organization are in the process of setting up a private fundraising campaign and applying for grants to support our members with getting the care we need. We are doing this because this truly is a life or death issue. People die because they cannot afford the care they need or because they are denied care due to lacking insurance. The funds raised will never be enough to help everyone

because health care is so expensive but we have to do something. We don't want our members to die or suffer more because the government refuses to grant them access to health insurance. You have the opportunity to change that this legislative session.

This bill is also about race, class, and who we see as part of our country and our community. The State of Connecticut, the Governor, and many in the Legislature say they want to tackle issues related to racial equity, and issues related to poor and working-class folks. This is your chance. A vast majority of the uninsured population in this state are black, brown, undocumented, and low-income. Expanding access to Husky is a racial and economic justice issue and if the state is going to stand behind black and brown people, passing a bill is a way to prove that support is real.

We envision a world where our members can live free from fear, free from discrimination, and be able not just to live but to thrive. We like to think that many of you here today want the same thing for all of Connecticut's residents. If that is true then we urge you to support SB956 with clear language to extend current HUSKY eligibility rules to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status to allow us to get closer to that vision.

Sincerely,

Imelda Diaz
Hartford Deportation Defense