

Testimony for S.B. No. 956: “AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS”

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

My name is Monika Doshi. I am a resident of West Hartford, a member of the Hartford Deportation Defense, and a public health professional.

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.

At a Convention of the Medical Committee for Human Rights held in Chicago in March 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr declared: “*Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane*”. Today, in the 21st century, the human right to health continues to be differentially realized with undocumented immigrants disproportionately affected. Legislative failure to institute equitable and humane national immigration reform, coupled with state- and other local-level inaction, has resulted in undocumented immigrants facing reduced options for health care coverage, a key determinant in health care access, utilization, and retention.

As you know, undocumented immigrants are currently ineligible for federally funded public health insurance programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid. Moreover, recent and comprehensive health care reform, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), has had far-reaching expansion of health care coverage for a large number of uninsured individuals in the US, marking a potential pathway to eliminating racial or ethnic health disparities and advancing the human right to health. The ACA, however, explicitly excludes undocumented immigrants from purchasing health coverage through the State Health Insurance Exchanges. Except for emergency medical care (i.e., hospital emergency departments), federally qualified health centers are among a patchwork of health care provision sites available to those who are under- and uninsured, including undocumented immigrants. These often-overburdened health care facilities are limited in their provision of services, referring patients in need of specialty care to organizations that result in prohibitive out-of-pocket costs for many, including undocumented immigrants.

In the absence of health care coverage and the presence of many other barriers (e.g., fear of detainment/deportation), undocumented immigrants experience differential access to health care services, contributing to delays in needed care, signaling potentially high levels of unmet health needs, and likely leading to downstream disparities in morbidity and mortality. Moreover, delays in entry and fragmented retention in care can exacerbate health issues, produce financial burdens for families, and potentially pose serious public health threats – a prevailing concern particularly within the context of global pandemics.

The most recent study (2017) by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates that undocumented immigrants in Connecticut contribute roughly \$125 million in state and local taxes. They cannot, however, access many of the programs their tax dollars support, including health care coverage. This is unconscionable. It is time for Connecticut to do the right thing. It is time for Connecticut to expand its HUSKY programs to all its residents independent of immigration status. The right to health is an unalienable human right. Connecticut is long overdue in upholding the right to health universally among all its residents.

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,
Monika Doshi, MPH

Member of the Hartford Deportation Defense & Resident of West Hartford