

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

My name is Colleen Fitzgerald, I am a resident from Granby. I am the daughter, sister, niece and spouse of immigrants.

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.

As I said, I was born in the US, but live in a family of 1st generation immigrants. I spent about 10 years of my childhood in Connecticut, growing up in Granby, attending Catholic schools in Simsbury and West Hartford. Then I moved on to college in Maine and eventually moved abroad to Argentina, where I met my current spouse and experienced life as an immigrant myself.

I want to share my experience in Argentina briefly, before I bring it back to CT. You see as an artist and community activist, my income over the last 6+ years has never been stable, but I continue to do this work because it is essential to a healthy society. In Argentina, there is universal health care. So as an immigrant, albeit very privileged coming from the US, but without much money, it was a comfort to know I could go to a public hospital whenever I needed regardless of my immigration status. That gave me an immense peace of mind, and I used the public health system in several emergency and non-emergency situations.

Fast forward a few years, and I have brought my Argentine husband to live with me in my home country. We went through this process in a time of extremely hostile anti-immigrant sentiment, but here we are. And as two young, able-bodied and hard working people, we are doing all we can to live a decent life here. Unfortunately the pandemic caused us to lose the jobs we secured just a few months prior, and we currently rely on the government provided social safety nets.

We were both uninsured for several months, as we lost our jobs and had to quickly move from NY to CT. Our biggest worry as this pandemic developed was going to the hospital without health insurance and falling into medical debt. Let me say that again, our biggest worry was not dying, but falling into crippling debt during this crisis. Things should not be this way!

Luckily in December 2020 we signed up for healthcare through Access Health; I was able to get Husky Health as a US citizen, but my spouse was not eligible due to not living in the country long enough. And while the healthcare remained relatively affordable for him, our differing immigrant statuses meant different access to affordable healthcare.

While I know the US is a ways away from the universal healthcare I experienced in Argentina, I'm hopeful that my home state can lead the way towards a more equitable system. Healthcare is a human right, but that is not how it is treated here. If you have the economic resources, you will get quality care. If you are poor, an immigrant, undocumented, you will not have access to the same care.

Coming from a family of immigrants, I know how hard they work just to get by in this country. They work harder than most. But social services often exclude them, especially those who are undocumented. We must make sure everyone has healthcare and it is for that reason 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,
Colleen Ndemeh Fitzgerald
Resident of Granby