

Template 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 Kristin Fortier. I am the Administrative Assistant for WAIM, Windham Area Interfaith Ministry, which serves 12 towns in the Windham region with emergency household goods and financial resources. I live in Mansfield, CT. I am also on the board of The Neighbor Fund, supporting undocumented immigrants in our region facing deportation and detention with funds for legal fees, lawyers, bond and family needs.

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.

I have lived in Windham County for the last 20 years, working in the Windham Public School System as Teaching Assistant, ABA Paraprofessional and Afterschool Director and Teaching Artist. I have also worked as Front End Manager for the Willimantic Food Coop for over 10 years. I currently work for WAIM, as mentioned above, which serves our community members in need of emergency material resources like clothing, housewares and furniture. We also provide rental assistance, emergency help with utilities and numerous other financial support and programs. I love my community and how we support one another.

I have been privileged to pretty much always have had healthcare in the jobs I’ve held, but more recently with two part time jobs, I have been able to access Husky Healthcare to support my health needs. It has been life saving for me in terms of access, cost and treatment. This is the second time I have had to access Husky Health Insurance and I am grateful it exists to help me. Many of my friends, who are undocumented immigrants, work, pay taxes and live in my community do not have any support for their healthcare needs. I have seen them battle Covid-19 with home remedies and struggle to make ends meet when paying out of pocket for life saving care. They are not able to access Husky Insurance and this frustrates and angers me that they and their families’ lives are at risk every day without healthcare and our state allows this to happen, yet we continue to take taxes out of their paychecks and appropriate them to pay for CT’s Husky Healthcare Fund.

At WAIM, community members, many of whom are undocumented seek out our services. Thankfully, we can offer some ways to offset the cost of living so that families can afford the medical expenses they incur, but it is still a day by day situation for most with trying to make ends meet. Families are desperate and doing the best they can, but the stress and strain is evident, especially with Covid and high rates of unemployment. We hear and see this almost every day from folks coming through our doors for help.

The lack of healthcare funding is a set up for failure for immigrants who work and live here and for all CT residents. The risks and financial setbacks due to healthcare bills can drive people into debt and homelessness or most don’t seek any care and they and their families suffer immensely with ill health and strain (and trauma) it brings on families, especially when a loved one dies. It is heartbreaking and inhumane. CT has prided itself on being for human rights and progressive ideals, yet we have still turn away from caring for each and every CT resident. When we invest in the healthcare of everyone we know that it saves lives and preserves wellness of everyone in a family.

If S.B. 956, with clear language to extend current HUSKY eligibility rules to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status were to pass it would be reinstating that in CT everyone’s life matters and undocumented immigrants deserve human rights just like every other CT resident. It would save the state and communities money that would no longer need to go into emergency aid for undocumented immigrants facing healthcare hardships because we would have preventative care for everyone.

S.B. 959 is a solid move toward a future that is equitable for every single adult and child, regardless of whether or not they carry papers. Each individual who has come here seeking a life of safety, ability to thrive and invest in their family and community, deserves to have this right just like any other CT constituent. Please support this bill.

Thank you for your time and attention to my request.

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