

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

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

My name is Dr. Zachary Harvanek, I am a practicing physician working across New Haven County and am a resident of Guilford. **I stand in support** of S.B. No. 956: AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS, but with modifications. S.B. 956 as currently written leaves out many in our immigrant community, including low-income parents, low-income elderly, children, and disabled individuals. **I support modifying S.B. No. 956 to include ALL CT residents regardless of immigration status** who would otherwise be eligible for HUSKY.

Since 2018, I have worked as a physician and psychiatrist across New Haven County, including in outpatient clinics, emergency rooms, inpatient medical wards, and inpatient psychiatric units. In these varied settings, I see a wide swath of patients: adolescents and the elderly; rich and poor; patients of every race, creed, and ethnicity; veterans and civilians; US citizens and undocumented immigrants; and the insured and uninsured.

The vast majority of my clinic patients have medical insurance of some form, be it HUSKY, Medicare, or private insurance. Many of the patients I see in clinic have been doing well for years. For example, one of my insured patients with severe bipolar disorder has required psychiatric hospitalization in the distant past, but since starting medications had been stable for decades. He is married, holds a well-respected job and is a valued member of his local community, donating his time and money to veteran’s assistance programs. However, early in the COVID-19 pandemic, this patient was temporarily unable to get his medications. He quickly developed symptoms and went to the emergency room. Thankfully, he was given his medications and he quickly recovered without needing to be hospitalized, and he remains stable to this day. However, this was a reminder that without his medications, this patient’s life would look vastly different than it does now.

Conversely, I often see uninsured patients in the emergency room or inpatient wards, many of whom are undocumented. These patients often do well once admitted to the hospital, but because they are unable to afford their medicine when discharged back home, they ultimately return to the emergency room with symptoms shortly after being discharged. One such patient with depression had been in the hospital for several weeks and had recovered *but he pleaded to remain in the hospital because he could not afford his medications*. Several weeks after discharge, this patient returned to the emergency room, again suffering from depression. He recognized this pattern, but he could do nothing to prevent it. His frequent symptoms and hospitalizations also meant he was unable to hold a steady job or develop relationships.

There is little difference in the severity of these patients’ diseases. Both respond well to their medicine and do poorly in its absence. The main distinction is that one receives their medication at home through insurance, and another can only get their medication in the hospital because they have no insurance to get it at home. This is not just poor clinical care: it is socially and fiscally irresponsible. One patient works, volunteers in his community, and pays taxes, while the other patient is physically unable to make these societal contributions. **This difference is solely because of insurance status, which in turn is only because of their respective birth locations.** While it is difficult to estimate the cost of any visit, emergency room and inpatient hospitalizations can cost thousands of dollars, and the costs of caring for uninsured patients who are unable to pay will be borne by our society at large, including Connecticut taxpayers. If a bill can provide patients with better clinical care *and* lower the societal costs, there is no reason not to support it.

Providing HUSKY to ALL undocumented residents will accomplish both goals. It is also the moral and humane path to care for our community members. For these reasons and more, **I support S.B. No 956 with the modifications above and hope the committee will make those changes.**

Thank you for your time,
Zachary Harvanek, M.D., Ph.D.

