

Dear Members of the Insurance and Real State Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Stefan Keller and I live in Hartford, Connecticut. I am a member of CT Students for a Dream and Make the Road Connecticut, two organizations that are led by and work in support of immigrant families and young people across the state. 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.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, over 50% of undocumented immigrants living in Connecticut are uninsured. That is over 60,000 people. That is 60,000 people that many times do not have a primary health care provider, that rely on emergency rooms and walk-in clinics as their primary source of healthcare, that are living with chronic conditions that go untreated, and that face huge medical bills that they cannot pay off. SB956 would open up access to Husky Insurance to undocumented families to allow them to get the care that they need.

I cannot imagine what my life growing up would have looked like without my parents having quality health insurance. When I was 18 I needed my appendix out which required surgery and an overnight stay in the hospital. When I was in middle school, I had an eating disorder and saw my pediatrician every few weeks for several months. When I was in high school, I had surgery to remove part of a lymph node to ensure there was nothing wrong with them. All of this would have been much harder to navigate had my family not had health insurance. My parents would likely not have been able to afford the regular visits to track my weight and health while I was anorexic and I may have faced far more severe consequences later in life. My parents may have waited until my appendix ruptured instead of bringing me to the hospital right away which could have been life-threatening. It very possible I could still be living with some of the negative health outcomes of these experiences had I not received the care I needed in the timeframe I needed it. This quality of care should be available to everyone, regardless of their immigration status.

I worked for several years doing college access work with CT Students for a Dream. I will never forget a high school senior that I met a few years ago. They were looking to go to college and when we talked about why that was important to them, they said because they needed health insurance to get surgery done that their family currently could not afford. Can you imagine being 18 and making your college decisions based on the health insurance options that they have after years of not receiving the care you needed and being in almost constant pain? This should not be happening in our state. Undocumented young people should have access to quality and affordable healthcare as children, as teenagers, and as working adults and should not have to find loopholes that only work for a select few to at least get some of the care that they need.

I also am a member of Hartford Deportation Defense and we are applying for grants and calling on private donors to try and raise money to support some of our undocumented members in getting the care that they need. Many have delayed seeing specialists or forgone preventative care because they simply cannot afford it and have conditions that have worsened because they do not have insurance to cover the cost of this care. This truly is a life-and-death situation for so many.

I like to believe that all of us want to live in a world where everyone can live longer, healthier lives. This bill is an opportunity to move us closer to that vision here in Connecticut. I urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to support SB956 this session to provide medical assistance to low-income residents regardless of immigration status.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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