

Testimony in Support of SB956

On behalf of IRIS- Integrated refugee and Immigrant Services

3/9/2021

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

My name is Camille Kritzman. I am a case manager at IRIS - Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services in New Haven, CT. The clients that I work with consist of undocumented residents, asylum seekers, and legal permanent residents, most of whom are ineligible for Husky coverage.

On behalf of IRIS, I testify in support of SB956: AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS, but with modifications.

SB956 as currently written leaves out many in our immigrant community, it leaves out low-income parents and children under HUSKY A and low-income elderly and disabled folks under HUSKY C. We support modifying SB956 to include ALL CT residents that qualify under the full current HUSKY eligibility.

In 2014, Connecticut immigrants contributed an estimated 1.8 billion dollars in state and local taxes, and 3.3 billion in federal taxes¹. Undocumented immigrants alone pay roughly 145 million dollars into state and local taxes every year², taxes that are then appropriated to fund Connecticut's HUSKY program. Yet, my clients who have been paying into this system for years cannot access health coverage due to HUSKY's limiting eligibility rules for immigrants. This is a public health crisis, especially during a pandemic. Unable to access primary care, when health issues arise that are too urgent to ignore, most of my clients get a ride to the emergency room. This causes an unnecessary strain of the time, resources, and effectiveness of emergency services. According to a Yale study published February 15, 2020³, providing medical coverage for all CT residents would be more cost effective to the state and prevent thousands of deaths. SB956 with modifications addresses this public health issue and takes the strain off of emergency services in our state.

The majority of the clients I work for are uninsured. Most of my clients have thousands of dollars in medical bills, and many have chronic medical needs that have gone untreated due to lack of insurance. I am going to share some stories today, with permission from my clients, of some cases that demonstrate the unnecessary danger and stress being uninsured can cause;

A single mother who has been a CT resident for the past 15 years has diabetes and was laid off in the pandemic. She used to work cleaning a factory at night that shut down in April 2020. She hasn't been able to find another job other than cleaning houses occasionally. She is facing eviction because she had to choose between paying hundreds for her insulin and staying alive, or paying rent.

¹ "The Contributions of New Americans in Connecticut." New American Economy Research Fund, n.d. <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/the-contributions-of-new-americans-in-connecticut/>

² "The Contributions of New Americans in Connecticut." New American Economy Research Fund, n.d. <https://research.newamericaneconomy.org/report/the-contributions-of-new-americans-in-connecticut/>

³ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)33019-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)33019-3/fulltext)

A family of 5, where the father has AIDS. The family relies on independent non-for-profits to access treatment for the father. Even still, with help from independent organizations that drop the price for medication, the family is stuck weekly deciding between purchasing food for their 3 children or medication.

A single mother of 3, who have been CT residents for 19 years. The 33 year old son is deaf, blind and mute. It was determined that he needed brain surgery. Unfortunately, the care needed is economically unfeasible for this family, so his health has continued to deteriorate. His mother has to stay home and care for her son, while her 2 teenage daughters work to support the family, and have put their education on hold to be able to do so.

A family with a single mother of 5's son was in a devastating car accident when a drunk driver hit him at full speed, destroying his car and injuring him. He panicked as the ambulance came because he was afraid he would not be able to afford the ride to the hospital. The family will not be able to pay the \$9,875.00 bill that the hospital charged them.

At IRIS it is our goal is to support immigrant families and displaced people who have made Connecticut their home, to meet their basic needs and thrive in their communities. It's not impossible for our clients to reach this goal without access to healthcare. This is why we stand in support of S.B. No 956 with the modifications mentioned that would include all CT residents regardless of immigration status, and hope the committee will make those changes.

Thank you for your time and implore the committee to vote favorably.

Camille Kritzman

Case manager at Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services