

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Senator Berthel and Representative Case;
Members of the Human Services Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Dr. Suzanne Lagarde and I am the CEO of Fair Haven Community Health Care, a Federally Qualified Health Center in greater New Haven that cares for over 22,000 predominantly low income, minority patients. I am testifying today in favor of SB 956, *An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status*

I doubt that any will deny that we have all just gone through one of the most challenging years of a lifetime—COVID has left its mark and its scars on every single one of us. It truly amazes me that despite this life changing experience, there remains some degree of hesitation on the part of some of our legislators and citizens to move forward on SB956 which would provide health care coverage to the majority of undocumented residents of CT. Had this legislation been in place prior to the current pandemic, I can assure you that lives would have been saved and the degree of suffering and pain would have been reduced.

Why can I make such a statement with total confidence? I run a health care facility in the Fair Haven neighborhood of New Haven. Nearly 25% of our 22,000 plus patients are undocumented. However, they are not the people that I worry most about. I worry about the tens of thousands of undocumented residents who do not seek our care or any type of medical care for that matter. For many, they do not seek care because they fear receiving bills. Others simply know that they don't have insurance and therefore shouldn't be seeking a service for which they cannot pay. They are proud people. Many have paid the ultimate price for this lack of coverage. They have paid with their lives and the lives of their loved ones. In many instances, their care was delayed and that delay cost them dearly.

I do not understand the thinking of those who want to deny these people the most elementary of human rights—basic health care. These people clean our homes and our workplaces, they grow our food, they pick up our garbage and they care for our children. They also contribute significantly to our tax base, contributing over \$140 MM in state and local taxes annually. Despite this, we turn our backs and deny them one of life's most precious assets, namely good health and the freedom from worrying about lack of health care for their families.

As I mentioned earlier, over 25% of our roughly 22,000 patients are undocumented. To be clear, we do not provide two types of care, i.e. care for the insured vs care for the uninsured. We provide the same level of compassionate, quality care to all. However, the lack of any financial support for the roughly 5,000 patients who have no insurance impacts our organization's ability to provide the highest quality care to all. We take from Peter to pay Paul all the time. So to naively assume that denying care to our uninsured neighbors benefits the rest of us by being fiscally prudent, I urge you to think otherwise.

In conclusion, I return to where I started this discussion, namely recalling the horrors of the COVID pandemic which have impacted every single one of us. There is no question that had our undocumented neighbors had HUSKY coverage when they became ill, many would still be alive today. There is also no question that this means that more of my friends and more of your friends and family who acquired COVID through contact with someone from the undocumented community would also be

alive today. We have said and heard time and time again through this pandemic that “we are all in this together”. This could not be more true than when we discuss the importance of providing health care to our undocumented neighbors. Keeping them healthy not only saves lives throughout our community, it is, simply stated, the right thing to do.

Respectfully submitted,

Suzanne Lagarde MD MBA FACP
CEO, Fair Haven Community Health Care
New Haven CT