

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 Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Laurel McCormack. I am a youth program coordinator at IRIS-Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services, a joint master’s student in the UCONN School of Social Work and Yale Divinity School, and a New Haven resident and registered voter of eight years.

I stand 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, including low-income parents and low-income elderly and disabled folks. I support modifying S.B. 956 with clear language that extends eligibility to all HUSKY programs to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status.

For the past seven years, I have been honored to work alongside immigrant youth, including refugees, Special Immigrant Visa holders, asylees, and those with no status. I coordinate an academic mentoring program and a young women’s social justice group for teens. Through getting to know the youth and their families, I have come to see many similarities between the stories and experiences of documented immigrants whom federal and state governments deems worthy of assistance and undocumented immigrants whom governments deem unworthy of aid. When immigrant students are in the classroom or teaching each other in a peer-led youth group, their legal status should not make a difference in their health and educational outcomes, and yet they absolutely do.

Several undocumented young women I work with have spent significant time out of school over the past several years with mental and physical pain that they tried to manage without medical care because of their families’ lack of insurance. Another undocumented student I work with was hit by a car while walking last year and his family was too afraid to take him immediately to the hospital for fear of having their immigrations status discovered and of being strapped with exorbitant medical bills; his teachers now tell me they are afraid he has lasting cognitive and learning issues from going so long with untreated head trauma. Dozens of youths’ families were hit by COVID in spring 2020 because their parents are frontline workers, and yet only those families with status and insurance were certain of being able to be treated without exorbitant bills, which kept many who should have sought medical care from doing so. I worry about the lasting impacts of severe untreated COVID reactions in the undocumented youth and parents I work with.

Without a right to physical and mental healthcare, undocumented immigrant residents of Connecticut will continue to face extreme threats to their educational, economic, and social wellbeing too. That we in New Haven owe so much to their organizing and community-building work over the last decade is a testament to their brilliance and strength and is astounding when viewed in light of the health precarity they have had to withstand.

I support S.B. No 956, with clear language added to extend current HUSKY eligibility rules to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status, and I ask the committee to support this legislation.

Thank you for your time,

Laurel McCormack
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