

Testimony In **SUPPORT** of SB 956:
An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status
March 11, 2021

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Dr. Shannon O'Malley. I am an Assistant Professor at Yale School of Medicine and I am a pediatrician who specializes in taking care of children in the hospital. I have also cared for children in a refugee clinic in New Haven, volunteered as a health educator with New Haven's local refugee resettlement organization, and completed an immigration advocacy elective at the Mexico border. This testimony reflects my own personal opinion and does not reflect the opinion of Yale or any organization with which I am affiliated.

As a child and immigrant health advocate and as a resident of Connecticut, I strongly **SUPPORT** SB 956, but with modifications to include all Connecticut residents that qualify under the full current HUSKY eligibility. I believe it is the moral imperative of our state to help care for the most vulnerable and that access to healthcare is a basic human right. It is also the correct decision from a fiscal and public health perspective.

Based on the most recent data, the Migration Policy Institute estimates that there are about 13,000 undocumented children currently living in Connecticut. Undocumented children are more likely than children with U.S. born parents to live below the federal poverty level despite the fact that their parents work and work more hours than typical U.S. born parents. Because of immigration status, however, these children currently do not qualify for HUSKY. Their families most often otherwise cannot afford to purchase insurance or pay for medical care out-of-pocket. Research has shown that those without insurance are understandably more likely to delay or refrain from care, resulting in worse long-term outcomes.

This is why many of my primary care colleagues, as they will testify, do not get to see these children, but I do as a doctor who works in hospitals. Instead of being able to receive excellent preventative care, families are forced to wait until emergencies to seek costly and complex care in the emergency room or hospital. For example, I recently cared for a teenager who became ill after infection with COVID-19. In the emergency room, we discovered he was also in heart and kidney failure. He went on to stay in the hospital for several long months. This child never had a well exam with a pediatrician which most likely could have caught his underlying issues with basic and inexpensive screening tests and potentially prevented the hospital admission, his kidney failure, and now need for lifelong dialysis or transplant.

Though this bill will require an initial large and continued financial investment, I believe it is an ethical and intelligent investment. Not only will this bill save on an individual case-by-case level like the example above demonstrates, but also on a greater public health level. Undocumented children are a considerable part of the economic future of this state and we know children with insurance have better school performance, better health as adults, and better earning potential as adults. Please help ensure these children- as all children should- have access to healthcare and the ability to reach their full potential.

Thank you for using your position on the Human Services Committee and for your commitment to child health. **Please SUPPORT SB 956.**

Thank you,

Shannon O'Malley, MD
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Resources:

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Mendoza FS. Health disparities and children in immigrant families: a research agenda. *Pediatrics*. 2009 Nov;124 Suppl 3:S187-95. doi: 10.1542/peds.2009-1100F. PMID: 19861469.

Yasenov VI, Lawrence D, Mendoza FS, Hainmueller J. Public Health Insurance Expansion for Immigrant Children and Interstate Migration of Low-Income Immigrants. *JAMA Pediatr*. 2019 Nov 18;174(1):22-8. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.4241. Epub ahead of print. Erratum in: *JAMA Pediatr*. 2020 Jan 1;174(1):103. PMID: 31738388; PMCID: PMC6865314.