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Testimony of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
in support of raised Senate Bill 956 *An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals*
Regardless of Immigration Status
March 11, 2021

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and honorable members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Senior Director of Public Policy, Advocacy and Organizing at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) testifying in support of raised S.B. 956 *An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status*. As the state's largest provider of family planning and sexual and reproductive health care to nearly 62,000 patients last year at 14 health centers across the state, Planned Parenthood believes all people should have access to quality, affordable, and compassionate health care — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or your immigration status.

Our state continues to confront simultaneous crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism that drives racial disparities in health care access and health outcomes. Now more than ever, people need health insurance coverage and access to health services. Yet, thousands of people, including immigrants, in our state still lack access to high-quality, affordable health care. This is always unacceptable—and even more unfair and cruel as we reflect on the one-year anniversary of a global pandemic that has claimed so many lives and left so many people with lifelong health concerns.

S.B. 956 is one way to address the coverage gap. This bill incorporates solutions to provide health care coverage for immigrants in our state by expanding a public health insurance option for undocumented individuals and families who are currently shut out of the health care market. We know that noncitizens are significantly more likely than citizens to be uninsured. Among the nonelderly population, 23% of lawfully present immigrants and more than four in ten (45%) undocumented immigrants were uninsured compared to less than one in ten (9%) U.S. citizens.ⁱ Eligibility restrictions on public and private insurance prohibit too many immigrant residents and families from obtaining coverage. Under HUSKY, only “qualified immigrants” are considered eligible – this rule forces lawful permanent residents, such as legal permanent residents or “green card” holders, to wait five years before being able to enroll in HUSKY. People need health care access now. Additionally, private market insurers often require a social security number with the application or proof of citizenship. Altogether, these barriers continue to prevent both lawfully present residents and undocumented individuals from accessing health care coverage—lack of insurance coverage is a substantial barrier to obtaining or seeking care.

Uninsured women often have inadequate access to care, get a lower standard of care when they are in the health system, and have poorer health outcomes.ⁱⁱ Barriers to health care coverage substantially impact immigrant women and families with low incomes. Lack of access to health care, including preventive care, contributes to poorer health outcomes for immigrants. Federal law already blocks many immigrants from accessing private and public health care coverage, and harsh immigration enforcement makes it difficult for communities to seek out health care or raise their families without fear. Currently, federal law prohibits undocumented immigrants, as well as many lawfully present immigrants, from enrolling in Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Federal law bans undocumented immigrants from purchasing affordable health insurance on the Marketplace, even with their own funds. About 60% of, non-U.S. citizen, low income immigrant women of reproductive age lack health insurance, which is more than twice the proportion of low-income U.S.-born women. Because many immigrant women can't access private or public health coverage, they are less likely than other U.S. born women to access lifesaving and essential preventive health care — such as Pap tests, annual exams, STD/STI screenings, and birth control.

People who are denied health coverage because of their immigration status depend on health care providers like Planned Parenthood who provide affordable, comprehensive primary and preventive health care. Yet, the fear of

law enforcement intervention and constant attacks on Planned Parenthood and other reproductive health care providers – like the Title X gag rule – make it more difficult for immigrants to access health care. Life as an undocumented resident can be full of fear, alienation, and stigma, which has only heightened over the last four years, and keep too many from seeking the lifesaving care they need. We know what happens when communities who already face barriers in accessing care are driven further into the shadows – they will forgo the care they need to preserve their own safety and economic security for their families.

All people deserve access to health care, regardless of immigration status. Health care is a fundamental human right that should be guaranteed to all people in our state. Opening the state’s HUSKY health program will allow all income-eligible Connecticut residents access to essential and lifesaving care, and work towards eliminating disparities in our health care system caused by systemic racism and economic inequity. Undocumented immigrants in our state pay roughly \$145 million in state and local taxes every year. In effect, undocumented taxpayers are funding a state health care program many rely on – but they themselves can’t use. They deserve an equal and fair opportunity to access the very safety net programs they help fund.

We will continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure our patients and communities have what they need to live healthy and self-determined lives. No one’s health should be compromised, or health care access denied because of their immigration status. Expanding access to health care for all people in our state is the right thing to do--we can, and we must do it. Investing in people’s health care now will have long term public health benefits for all communities and we know the dire, human consequences of inaction. We strongly urge the committee to support S.B. 956 and take another important step in addressing health inequities in our state and bring us closer to achieving health care for all. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important and much needed legislation.

ⁱ Health Coverage of Immigrants, Kaiser Family Foundation. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/fact-sheet/health-coverage-of-immigrants/>

ⁱⁱ Women’s Health Insurance Coverage, Kaiser Family Foundation <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/fact-sheet/womens-health-insurance-coverage/>