

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

My name is Maya Salas, and I am a resident from Norwalk as well as an educator in Danbury.

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, it leaves out low-income parents and children under HUSKY A and low-income elderly and disabled folks under HUSKY C. I support modifying SB956 to include ALL CT residents that qualify under the full current HUSKY eligibility.

As a teacher working in Danbury, I've seen firsthand how lack of access to healthcare affects low-income immigrant communities in our state. As COVID-19 hit our communities last spring and schools were forced to move to distance learning for the 2020-2021 school year, I witnessed how immigrant families--many of whom were the essential workers risking their lives everyday so supply resources to the rest of the state--bore the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. As weeks passed and I called home to families whose students stopped participating in school, I learned that mothers, fathers, and entire families had become infected with COVID-19. Out of work and with no healthcare, undocumented immigrant families fell in danger of losing not only their jobs but their housing as well. I learned quickly my role as an educator had to change. How could I ask students to participate in school work when their families remained uncertain of job, food, housing, and healthcare security?

Lack of access to healthcare because of documentation status not only affected the physical health and economic stability of my students' families, but it also became a barrier preventing students from engaging in their education. Students fell behind in school and at a disproportionate rate for students from immigrant families. Expanding HUSKY to undocumented immigrants then, is not just a healthcare issue. It becomes an educational issue when lack of healthcare access impedes students from fully accessing and participating in the education to which they're entitled.

The truth of the matter is that the COVID-19 pandemic merely magnified existing systemic inequities, but it did not create them. Lack of access to primary care and healthcare means that chronic health issues that could be treated are allowed to develop into more serious conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease. Extending HUSKY to all regardless of status and income will allow communities to receive the proper care and treatment they deserve, and ensure families and individuals are not at risk of economic insecurity as a result of seeking medical care. For educational access, it will mean students will be alleviated from stressing about the health of themselves and their families. With greater health security and confidence that neither immigration nor economic status will bar them and their families from receiving healthcare, students will be provided greater structural support to focus on their learning and educational growth.

I strongly support S.B. No 956 with the modifications explained above. I hope the committee will take the time to thoroughly consider these changes and the expansive impact they can have on thousands of essential lives.

Thank you for your time,

Maya Salas