

Human Services Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
*S.B. 956: An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of
Immigration Status*

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-seven years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policy solutions to enhance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity in our state.

CWEALF urges the Committee to support *S.B. 956: An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status*.

Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right and no one should be denied health care due to inability to pay or immigration status. The current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many issues that affected families in Connecticut long before the crisis hit, including inequities in access to health care to folks who are low-income or who have different immigration statuses.

Women, especially women of color, are disproportionately affected by the pandemic and are overrepresented in low-wage jobs on the frontlines of the crisis that lack access to critical policies like paid leave or employer provided health care. In Connecticut, 6.1% of women aged 19-64 are uninsured. Women who are marginalized, including Black women, women of color, women with disabilities, women who are transgender, and women with low income already face significant barriers to care, including the cost of care and discrimination in the health care system. These barriers have significantly worsened throughout the pandemic due to incessant increase of unemployment rates mixed with the consistent upsurge of coronavirus cases.

Due to racism, sexism, and other systemic barriers that contribute to a lack of access to affordable, quality health care, women of color experience significant health disparities. Black women are 40% more likely to die from breast cancer than white women and also experience a higher rate of maternal mortality, as they are 3 to 4 times more likely to die during childbirth than non-Hispanic white women. Latina women also often face serious health disparities and have the highest incidence rate of cervical cancer in the United States.

No one should be forced to choose between accessing the care they need and paying their bills or taking care of their families. During a pandemic, it is even more important to ensure that folks stay home if they are sick, or get the treatment they need instead of returning to work and exposing others to the virus.

CWEALF recommends that the current bill language is simplified and made clearer to state that all HUSKY programs are included. S.B. 956 should also include the smaller programs for breast cancer and dialysis, for all members of the undocumented community. All programs should have entitlement and not only be “within available appropriations”.

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We urge the Committee to vote favorably in support of S.B. 956 to ensure that all families are given the opportunity to access health care if they or their loved ones need it. It is critical that Connecticut addresses the inequities of healthcare accessibility and its negative effects on all of its residents. Senate Bill No. 956 is an essential step forward towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering consequences, as well as the creation of a healthier and more equitable state overall.