



Testimony of
[Roger Senserrich](#), Communications Director
Connecticut Working Families Organization

March 11, 2021

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

My name is Roger Senserrich, and I am the Communications Director at CT Working Families Organization. We're an anti-racist, multi-racial, progressive political organization that builds power for working people.

We stand in support of S.B. 956, An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status. S.B. 956 will make healthcare more equitable, dependable, and affordable by opening access to insurance to many Connecticut residents, regardless of their citizenship status.

The Coronavirus pandemic has made clear that healthcare is not just an individual matter. COVID-19 did not distinguish by race, color, or immigration status. Its impact, in fact, has hit the hardest among communities of color. As of last month, the risk of hospitalization due to COVID for Latinos and African Americans was three times higher than for whites. The risk of dying from the infection remains twice as high.¹

Lack of access to healthcare has been a major factor driving these inequities. We know that lack of insurance and underinsurance remains is much higher among families of color²; these gaps of coverage are even more prevalent among the immigrant community in our state. Undocumented immigrants are barred from accessing health coverage in our state, both through Health Access CT and through HUSKY, the state insurance program for children and low-income families. More than half of Connecticut's undocumented do not have any health coverage³.

The pandemic has deepened many of these inequities. Job losses during the past year have been the highest among people color, with many losing health insurance alongside their employment. It is

¹ CDC data, updated Feb. 18, 2021 - available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

² In Connecticut, Hispanic residents are close to three times less likely than whites to have health insurance. Source: <https://www.kff.org/uninsured/state-indicator/nonelderly-uninsured-rate-by-raceethnicity/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

³ Profile of the Unauthorized Population - CT." Migrationpolicy.org, 1 June 2020, www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/CT.

imperative, then, that any health reform in our state includes immigrant populations; not only were they the most at risk before the pandemic, but they have fared the worst because of it.

The issue of access to the health exchange is being addressed through a separate piece of legislation (S.B. 842), that we also support⁴. The present bill, S.B. 956, removes restrictions to immigration statutes for HUSKY enrollment, opening access to health insurance to immigrant children and families in our state. If passed, this bill will offer tens of thousands of uninsured immigrants in our state the chance to receive insurance coverage, greatly reducing health disparities in our state.

Expanding HUSKY is not just a moral imperative, but an economic one as well. Undocumented immigrants often postpone care, as they don't have access to doctors. Many rely on emergency rooms, the most expensive form of healthcare available - and one that often ends up costing state and federal budgets millions of dollars in expensive hospital reimbursements when they cannot pay for the coverage. Expanding insurance to immigrants will not only improve their health, but also reduce state costs.

Immigrants are our neighbors, our friends, people that live next to us. Many of them are essential workers, with jobs in retail, transportation, or healthcare. They are the backbone of our economy, in many ways; they contribute more than \$120 million in state and local taxes every year⁵. They have gone through the pandemic facing some of the highest risks, yet they have been denied coverage.

I am an immigrant myself. Although I stayed insured during most of my time in Connecticut, I distinctly recall each of the times when my health coverage lapsed, with no access to either private or public care. Every headache, every slip, every persistent cough felt different, because I was well aware that a doctor visit could end up costing much more than I could afford. Living under that uncertainty, that fear, is not easy, yet we ask tens of thousands of our neighbors under that shadow, with any alternative but trust their good fortune, even during the worst pandemic over a century.

We cannot accept this.

I urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to support S.B. 956 this session. Thousands left out of the recovery need emergency care, now.

Thank you for your time,

Roger Senserrich

Communications Director

Working Families Organization, CT

⁴ Carlos Moreno, State Director, testimony is available at: <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/INSdata/Tmy/2021SB-00842-R000209-Moreno,%20Carlos-CT%20Working%20Families%20Org-Supports-TMY.PDF>

⁵ <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions-2017/>