

Testimony in **SUPPORT** of S.B. No. 956: “AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS”

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

My name is Alice Shen, and I am a resident psychiatrist working in New Haven, CT. I stand in support of S.B. No. 956: “AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS,” a bill which would expand eligibility for all HUSKY programs to all low-income Connecticut residents regardless of immigration status.

As a child, I grew up with my grandmother. Due to uncertainty around qualifications for state assistance, she avoided medical care for many years. It was only when a local infection spread in her body that we sought medical care. We learned that she qualified for Medicaid based on her particular immigration status. Thankfully, her infection was also early enough to treat.

In writing this testimony today, however, I think of the individuals and patients I have since met who are barred from a similar peace of mind and medical care due to their immigration status. With this bill, I hope that Connecticut can join California, Illinois, New York, and other states which already expand Medicaid coverage to income-eligible children regardless of immigration status. Furthermore, I hope that Connecticut’s lawmakers will lead the nation in expanding coverage to all income-eligible adults and senior citizens.

Since 2018, I have worked as a psychiatrist and physician in clinical settings across the Greater New Haven area, including outpatient mental health clinics, inpatient medical and mental health units, and emergency rooms. Prior to that, I completed a portion of my medical training at Elmhurst Hospital in Jackson Heights, Queens, where up to 79% of essential workers are estimated to be undocumented individuals.

More recently, I have also been a member of the Connecticut Mutual Aid network and worked to field healthcare related questions during the pandemic. Through our anonymous public hotline, many individuals have inquired after protections for undocumented individuals seeking COVID-19 care. Though Governor Ned Lamont’s order to expand Emergency Medicaid to COVID-19 testing was an important step, many individuals remain hesitant to seek care. They fear jeopardizing their immigration status via the “public charge” rule. Given historical exclusion from medical care, they also fear that COVID-19 related hospitalization and care will not be covered. As a physician, I have seen individuals defer medical attention due to these justified concerns until it is too late to prevent further illness—as my grandmother almost did.

Currently, the healthcare system in which I work bars individuals from accessing the same medical care to which they contribute millions of their own taxpayer dollars each year. Through this exclusion, our healthcare system discourages individuals from accessing essential and potentially life-saving care. As a physician and daughter of immigrants, I fully support expansion of Medicaid to all income-eligible residents regardless of their immigration status. I believe this is a necessary step in ensuring the health and equity of our entire community.

Thank you for taking my testimony into consideration for this important matter. Please note that my views expressed above are my own and not representative of my institution.

Thank you for your time,

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