



**Testimony of James E. Shmerling, President and CEO at  
Connecticut Children's Medical Center  
to the Human Services Committee  
Regarding SB 956- *An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals  
Regardless of Immigration Status*  
March 10, 2021**

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and other esteemed members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts about Senate Bill 956, *An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status*. I am submitting testimony in support of this proposed legislation because children who have a consistent source of health care coverage are more likely to have access to the health care services that they need and deserve. The year 2020 was tough for all of us and the challenges children currently face are great. From disruptions to their education, caregivers losing jobs, and social isolation, there are no shortage of ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected young people. The good news is that we can put kids on a path to success if we all work together to make them a priority. All children should be able to access high quality and affordable healthcare, regardless of where they live, how much their caregivers earn, or their immigration status. Consistent access to care improves the overall health and wellbeing of our children, allowing them to grow, learn and succeed to their fullest potential.

Before commenting on the bill, I wish to provide some background about Connecticut Children's, a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 2,900 employees and 1,190 providers on our medical staff, we are the only hospital in the State dedicated exclusively to the care of children. Although our main hospital campus is located in Hartford, we have over a dozen locations across the state and partner with many adult providers and health systems throughout the region to help our pediatric experts provide care to children from all corners of Connecticut. In addition to caring for kids in the clinical setting and our cutting-edge pediatric research, we remain committed to keeping children in our communities healthy through community-initiatives that help address the social determinants of health, because as we know, many of the challenges facing children and families have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Senate Bill 956 would expand access to Medicaid and HUSKY B to children regardless of their immigration status. Connecticut's HUSKY program provides health care coverage to our State's most vulnerable children but it overlooks a group that has particular vulnerabilities—children who are undocumented. At Connecticut Children's, more than half of our patients who require an inpatient hospital stay rely on HUSKY as do more than two-thirds of those who require care in our Emergency Department. A much smaller number of our patients are uninsured and some of those lack insurance coverage because they are undocumented, but Connecticut Children's provides the care children deserve regardless of their insurance status. We will never turn a child away, but our pediatric experts know that children who have health coverage have better

short and long-term health outcomes. Children with health coverage are more likely to access primary care, more likely to receive consistent care for chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes, and less likely to rely on the emergency room. Healthy children miss fewer school days and have greater school success. If Connecticut enacted SB 956, we would join seven other states and the District of Columbia in addressing a critical health need for some of the most at risk children in our communities.

Healthier kids today mean healthier adults tomorrow. Investing in our children is an essential step for building our future workforce and reducing the cost of their future health care needs. State policies must support the programs, services and delivery systems that will promote each child's optimal emotional and physical health. Please support this important legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Emily Boushee ([eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org](mailto:eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org)), Government Relations Associate at Connecticut Children's.