

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

My name is Rebeca, I am a medical student from New Haven. I am also a director at the HAVEN Free Clinic, which is a student-run clinic based out of the Yale School of Medicine for uninsured patients in the Greater New Haven area.

I stand in support of S.B. No. 956: "AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS," with clear language that extends eligibility to all HUSKY programs to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status.

At HAVEN Free Clinic, we see the full extent of what not having health insurance means for our patients and how unnecessarily difficult it is for our patients to get dignified care. Our clinic exists to fill the gap in care for uninsured patients in Greater New Haven. At every step in the healthcare system, we have to fight to get our patients access to care. It is heartbreaking for us that nearly every patient that walks through our doors has been denied healthcare at some point due to lack of health insurance.

When patients get to our clinic, they are often on the verge of medical emergency. We have patients who haven't taken their diabetes medications for years because they could not afford them. Oftentimes, this results in excessive emergency visits that could have been avoided had these patients had access to affordable medications and primary care. When our patients need specialty care, they often wait months until they are able to be seen due to the long process of applying for financial assistance. Even then, our patients are often turned away by mistake because they do not have health insurance. We receive calls almost daily from patients worried that they will not receive the care that they need because they do not have health insurance. When our student-run clinic cannot handle a challenging case, we transfer to a local Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). During the pandemic, however, we have seen that our patients unable to pay even a sliding scale fee or discounted medication. It is not uncommon that our patients tell us they have been forced to make the decision between paying for rent and food for their families and paying for medications.

Connecticut's social and economic fabric is composed of immigrants. The state has the 11th highest percentage of foreign-born residents in the country yet continues to deny immigrants access to affordable health coverage. The need for uninsured migrants to rely on care provided primarily by students highlights further the unjust inequities, rooted in discrimination, within our healthcare system. Expanding Medicaid would be an incredible step towards health equity in our state. This pandemic has further shown us that the health and well-being of our most at-risk communities affects the health of all of us.

In summary, we ask the Human Services Committee to support S.B. No 956 and extend current HUSKY eligibility rules to all CT residents, regardless of immigration status.

Thank you for your time,  
Rebeca Vergara Greeno  
HAVEN Free Clinic  
Executive Director