

Testimony for Public Option SB # 842 given by Rhona Cohen of New Britain CT.

Since March of 2020 I've lost five family members and three friends. two to covid and one to very aggressive cancer. As public officials in towns all across Connecticut you probably have heard from constituents who have been very ill or have lost family in this crisis. I think the reason some of us have lost so many is the lack of access to healthcare not just over the last year but over lifetimes. over generations.

I've been a very lucky African American woman, since both of my parents served during the Korean war I was born into a family that had government provided healthcare and so I grew up always being able to go and see the doctor. If you grow up going to see a doctor getting the healthcare that you require you not only have more knowledge about what is healthy and what is not healthy specifically for you, not only can you go to a doctor when you're sick and get preventative care when you're healthy, but you form a relationship with the whole health care system, You develop and are taught to trust that system this can only be developed through long-term continuous care. Now we need to vaccinate and there's a very big worry that folks won't seek the vaccination because they don't trust medical professionals and that could very well cause more death and illness and loss that is preventable.

I am lucky as an adult to receive the state employees' health care benefits, as do all of you. I have weathered a catastrophic health crisis and have had a long struggle back to being my whole healthy self. I would not have been able to get healthy again if my crisis had led to financial ruin as it does for so many people. I have been supported in my journey by my church community and it hurts to think that we can't offer the staff at our church the best health care insurance or that they can't afford it because of a systemic denial of this benefit that I have been privileged to access. No one should need to be lucky or privileged when it comes to their health care. It should be considered a public utility, because it is an economic and moral good to promote the health of every individual in the state.

So if you believe the health care disparities need to be addressed, you need to act. If you have even one colleague, friend or family member that has less access to high quality affordable health care, you need to act. I'm here to say that we should do everything we can as a state to eliminate the gap between those that have health care and have a healthy trusting relationship with the healthcare system and those that don't.. Taking steps to cure our systemic inequities in health care is a crucial action that we must take. In this way you all will be the leaders we elected; leaders that work towards healing each other and this country; leaders of whom we can be proud.