

Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Dear Members of Insurance and Real Estate of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Will O'Meara , I am from Waterbury, Connecticut. I am the Co-Owner and Operator of Hungry Reaper Farm in Morris, CT. We are a small, diversified vegetable farm that grows food for farmers markets and grocery stores in our community, as well as a growing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. I support S.B. 842: An Act Concerning Health Insurance and Health Care in Connecticut.

S.B. 842 will work towards making health care more equitable, dependable, and affordable by creating new public options for health insurance in our state. Our farm needs access to affordable, high quality health care for a multitude of reasons. Farming is an inherently dangerous job, and the risk of injury from repetitive motions, physical strain, and accidents involving machinery is extremely high. The COVID 19 pandemic has also increased our risk, as we are exposed to hundreds of customers each week at the farmers market and making deliveries around the state. Better options for health care would bring some peace of mind for us and our employees, knowing that an injury or illness requiring treatment would not bring an untimely end to our business. Furthermore, providing the benefit of health insurance to our employees is not something we have been able to afford in the past, and is not a benefit either my fiancé or I received in our work as farmworkers prior to starting our own farm. Providing this benefit would help us to attract and retain higher caliber employees, allowing us to serve our community more effectively for years to come.

New public options are good for our economy, keep workers healthy, and allow small businesses to spend more resources creating jobs in our state. As an active member and Co-President of the Steering Committee of the New CT Farmer Alliance, I know that this issue resonates with our membership. The New CT Farmer Alliance is a statewide network of approximately four hundred farmers whose mission is to bring together emerging farmers from across CT to network, share resources, and identify common challenges and opportunities for a more accessible, successful, and diverse agricultural community. At our annual meeting in early 2020, our members ranked health care as a chief concern facing their farms. Reducing the cost and accessibility of healthcare would help to reduce the barriers to entry for young people who want to enter the farming profession and encourage an increase of small farms serving our state.

I urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to support S.B. 842 this session to expand high-quality, dependable, and affordable health care by creating new public options for health insurance.

Thank you for your time,
Will O'Meara, Co-Owner/Operator, Hungry Reaper Farm