

My name is Kenneth Barela, I live in Glastonbury, CT. I am writing to provide testimony in strong support of S.B. 1056, “An Act Expanding Access to Medical Services.” I serve as Chief Executive Officer of the Hispanic Health Council (HHC) and submit my testimony on behalf of this statewide, community-based organization. The Hispanic Health Council’s mission is to improve the health and social well-being of Latinos and other diverse communities. Senate Bill 1056 is of major relevance to the health and well-being of the communities that we serve.

SB 1056 would restore HUSKY A parent eligibility to the pre-2015 limit of 201% of the federal poverty level. The 2015 reduction in income level limited allowable income to \$35,100/year or \$16/hour for a household of 3 with one adult working full time, and as a result 11,200 parents lost coverage. SB 1056 would increase income eligibility for the same parents to \$44,000/year or \$21/hr.

SB 1056 would also increase HUSKY eligibility limits for adults without dependents on HUSKY D to 201% FPL. Current eligibility limits a 1-person household earnings to up to \$17,774/year, or \$8/hour, which is less than minimum wage. The increase to 201% of the federal poverty level would increase HUSKY D eligibility to \$25,700/year or \$12/hour.

HHC works daily with people throughout the state who are challenged by social determinants that impact health, among them poverty and lack of health insurance. We witness daily the inequities in insurance coverage experienced by people of color, who are far more likely to go without insurance than the state’s general population. We also see many people who are just above Medicaid income eligibility but cannot afford to buy private insurance. As the minimum wage increases to address the serious issue of poverty in our state, ironically, more people would become ineligible for Medicaid, but still unable to secure private coverage. The gaps in care due to lack of insurance and under-insurance were exacerbated and spotlighted by the pandemic. The tragedy of the pandemic should move us to make right the wrongs that have existed for far too long.

We know that regular access to healthcare coverage results in use of care in a timely manner, thus facilitating illness prevention, and prevention of complications when illness is present. Lack of coverage results in the opposite – avoidance of care when it is needed, thus increasing illness, complications, and mortality. The imperative is to protect healthcare as a human right. The side benefit is the long-term savings incurred through prevention of the significantly higher healthcare costs related to complications, often treated first in emergency departments, then inpatient, and paid indirectly by all of us.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony regarding S.B. 1056, “An Act Expanding Access to Medical Services.”

Sincerely,

Kenneth Barela, MBA
Chief Executive Officer
Hispanic Health Council