



Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW
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Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.**

**In support of raised S.B. 1056 *An Act Expanding Access to Medical Services*
March 24, 2021**

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and honorable members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Senior Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Organizing at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England (PPSNE) testifying in strong support of raised S.B. 1056 *An Act Expanding Access to Medical Services*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England is the largest provider of sexual and reproductive health care in Connecticut, serving over 62,000 patients annually at 14 health centers. Our Stamford and Hartford health centers are NCQA certified patient-centered medical homes, offering primary care. As a health care provider and advocate we believe all people should have access to quality, affordable health care—regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance, or your immigration status. Planned Parenthood is compelled to speak out about the importance of the Medicaid program to our patients, nearly half who are enrolled in the HUSKY health program, and as a member of the Medicaid Strategy Group, a coalition of Connecticut Medicaid advocates.

Our state continues to confront simultaneous crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism that drives racial disparities in health care access and health outcomes. Now more than ever, people need health insurance coverage and access to health services. Yet, thousands of people, including immigrants, in our state still lack access to high-quality, affordable health care. This is always unacceptable—and even more unfair and cruel as we reflect on the one-year anniversary of a global pandemic that has claimed so many lives and left so many people with lifelong health concerns.

Medicaid is an integral part of our nation's and state's health care system and essential source of health care for women, and without it, too many people—including a disproportionate number of women of color—would be forced to forgo receiving basic health care, including family planning and maternity care. In fact, one in five women of reproductive age in our country are insured through Medicaid. Medicaid eligibility expansion has transformed how pregnancy-related care is paid for in this country, enabling women with low incomes to begin prenatal care as early in pregnancy as possible in order to improve their chances of having a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby.

The HUSKY Health program is one of the most important programs for children and families to get and sustain essential and affordable health care coverage for their families in our state. For people at lower income levels, it is the best option because it removes the barrier of deductibles and co-pays AND is matched by the federal government. We strongly support this bill as the need to increase eligibility HUSKY A, HUSKY C and HUSKY D is urgent to improve access for physical and mental health coverage for people in our state.

People of color are far more likely to go without insurance than the state average. This injustice is rooted in discrimination in employment, education, and housing. When Connecticut implemented the ACA, these disparities started to shrink, but they are now stable or growing again. Also, some people will lose Medicaid eligibility as the minimum wage increases. The minimum wage increase is needed and important, but does not cover the cost of health insurance even with subsidies and cost sharing on Access Health CT

We urge the Committee to expand this bill to increase access to HUSKY to include all income-eligible immigrants regardless of their status through passing SB 956 along with this bill and to expand to all disabled adults, those over 65 as well as those under.

Planned Parenthood will continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure our patients and communities have what they need to live healthy and self-determined lives. No one's health should be compromised, or health care access denied because of their insurance status, income or

immigration status. Expanding access to health care for all people in our state is the right thing to do, expanding access to HUSKY Health is one way to do that--we can, and we must do it. Investing in people's health care now will have long term public health benefits for all communities and we know the dire, human consequences of inaction. We strongly urge the committee to support S.B. 1056 and take another important step in addressing health inequities in our state and bring us closer to achieving health care for all. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important and much needed legislation.