



**Testimony in Support of Raised Bill S.B. 956
(An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals
Regardless of Immigration Status)**

By Jay E. Sicklick, Deputy Director, Center for Children's Advocacy
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Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Ranking members Berthel and Case, and members of the Human Services Committee: thank you for providing the **Center for Children's Advocacy** with an opportunity to submit testimony in support of Raised Bill 956, **An Act Providing Medical Assistance to Certain Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status**. I am the Deputy Director of the Center for Children's Advocacy ("CCA") and an attorney who has worked for the past twenty-one years on issues involving children's health and child welfare in Connecticut. CCA is the largest non-profit legal organization in New England devoted exclusively to protecting and advocating on behalf of the legal rights of children. CCA is affiliated with the University of Connecticut School of Law and provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut communities through individual representation, education and training, and systemic advocacy. I also submit this testimony as Director of the Center's *Medical-Legal Partnership*, an interdisciplinary collaboration between CCA and medical/clinical partners that seeks to improve children's health outcomes through interdisciplinary interventions in Connecticut.

We support the passage of Raised Bill No. 956, AN ACT PROVIDING MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS ... To expand Medicaid and Husky B for children and adults regardless of immigration status because expanding access to health insurance for this vulnerable population is good public health policy

As a child advocates and attorneys, we believe that Raised S.B. 956 is a critically important first step in addressing an important public health issue – providing health insurance coverage through the state's Medicaid and HUSKY B programs to insure all the state's most vulnerable children, specifically undocumented children and youth under the age of 19. At present, Connecticut provides healthcare coverage to the state's most vulnerable, low-income children, but leaves out undocumented immigrant children due to their immigration status. Connecticut should not deny access comprehensive health insurance coverage to a relatively small number of its residents; children who have, for the most part, suffered adverse childhood experiences both in their country of origin and here in the United States due to their immigration status.¹

¹ Adverse Childhood Experiences ("ACE"), such as abuse or neglect, Adverse Childhood Experiences have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. See Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Violence Prevention webpage at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/aboutace.html>

WHY: In Connecticut, **HUSKY** coverage guarantees children the comprehensive health services they require, such as well-care check-ups, dental care, immunizations, prescriptions, and health screenings. Research shows increase enrollment and access to Medicaid programs such as **HUSKY** will:

- **Increase the number of insured children who are eligible for preventative care** and thus screenings for physical and behavioral health can spot problematic issues *before* acute consequences arise.
- **Decrease emergency department usage** for emergent and non-emergent care. Uninsured populations utilize emergency departments for actual emergencies and for non-acute issues that can easily be addressed in the traditional primary care setting.
- **Decrease hospital losses** due to uncompensated and unreimbursed care. Connecticut hospitals provided \$806 million in unreimbursed care and uncompensated care in 2019.² Health insurance for this population reduces expensive, uncompensated emergency care, increases access to primary care and promotes early detection of chronic disease.
- **Improve educational outcomes.** Medicaid access not only improves health outcomes but also increases attendance in school. Children who benefit from Medicaid eligibility are much more likely to graduate from, high school and more likely to take advantage of post-secondary educational opportunities and to graduate from college.³
- Expansion of coverage to the state's most vulnerable population will **also reduce racial and ethnic disparities** in coverage by increasing access to comprehensive care to children who have predominantly emigrated from Latin American, Asian and African countries.

Who: There are approximately 13,000 undocumented children and youth under the age of 19, many of whom are our clients and patients of our clinical partners across the state, who would benefit from the expansion of Medicaid and HUSKY B in Connecticut. **Connecticut** would follow the lead of six states and the District of Columbia in expanding its publically funded health insurance programs for low-income children to include undocumented children and youth. California, Illinois, New York, Oregon and Washington and the District of Columbia provide full coverage to the Medicaid and Child Health Insurance (CHIP) population, while Massachusetts provides basic coverage with statutory caps on services.⁴

² Conn. Office of Health Strategy 2020 Annual Report on the Financial Status of Connecticut's Short Term Acute Care Hospitals for Fiscal Year 2019. See https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OHS/ohca/HospitalFillings/2020/Financial-Stability-Report_2019.pdf

³ Under the landmark United States Supreme Court ruling in *Plyler v. Doe*, the court held that denying children of undocumented immigrants the right to attend public school constitutes discrimination based on alienage that violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

⁴ California expanded its healthcare to include undocumented children in several stages, starting in 1992, 1998, 2001 and 2015. Illinois – 2006, Massachusetts – 1996, New York – 1990, Oregon – 2018, Washington (state) – 2007, District of Columbia – 2000.

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How: Connecticut should expand the state’s Medicaid and HUSKY B programs to include all children otherwise eligible, including undocumented children and youth. In a thorough and comprehensive study by the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy and commissioned by the Connecticut Health Foundation, projections for the costs of expanding insurance coverage for this population are approximately \$11.3 million of the expansion in year one, and \$13.9 million for year two and for ongoing coverage.⁵ These costs will *not* be reimbursed by the federal government as traditional Medicaid expenditures are. The cost of insuring these particularly vulnerable children and youth, however is infinitesimally small in light of the Department of Social Services’ proposed budget which exceeds \$4.5 billion for the next two fiscal years.⁶

Next Steps: The bill as presently written provides that Conn. Gen. Stat. Section 17b-261 (the Medicaid statute) is amended *but only* “[w]ithin available appropriations.” The Human Services Committee should revise this language to ensure that Medicaid (and HUSKY A) coverage to all individuals is guaranteed in the same manner that all Medicaid eligible children in Connecticut presently receive – regardless of their immigration status.

Connecticut has been a national leader in expanding publically funded health insurance to its low-income population – first through its wholesale expansion of the HUSKY program in 1998 and then through its Medicaid expansion via the Affordable Care Act in 2010. The state should follow its own example by optimizing healthcare access by expanding eligibility for Medicaid (HUSKY A) and HUSKY B benefits to all children, regardless of their immigration status, to promote true health equality.

Respectfully submitted,

/S/ Jay E. Sicklick

Jay E. Sicklick,
Deputy Director

⁵ See Kelly Whitener, JD/MPH, *Expanding HUSKY Coverage for Children in Connecticut*, available at <https://www.cthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Expanding-HUSKY-Coverage-for-Children-Sept-2020.pdf>

⁶ Governor Lamont’s 2022-2023 biennial budget at B-57. See https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/Budget/2022_2023_Biennial_Budget/Bud_WebPage/GovBud_2022-23_Final_Web_Update.pdf