

**Testimony of HB-05005: An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the
Biennium Ending June 30, 2021**

Appropriations Committee

February 19, 2020

Greetings to the distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ellen Smith Ahern and I am a resident of Durham, CT. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of both restoring eligibility rates for HUSKY A to 201% of the federal poverty level and expanding coverage to include immigrant families regardless of their status.

I'm here today to represent two perspectives, the first of which is that of a mother of two young children, both of whom I gave birth to and cared for in the first years of their lives while covered by state health insurance. They're 5 and 7 years old now - they're funny, they're kind, they're imaginative and most importantly, they are healthy. *Accessing Medicaid was absolutely essential to my family's health and wellbeing.* As a white family with two working parents and ample social capital, we are fortunate to have been able to leap over the coverage gap and are now able to afford health insurance through my partner's work, but this is not a privilege all CT families have, no matter how hard they work.

There are approximately 187,000 CT residents who don't have health insurance, a disproportionate number of whom represent black and brown communities whose income hovers near the federal poverty level. Among the most commonly uninsured are immigrant communities, both legal, permanent residents and those still seeking documentation. As a Social Work graduate student at UCONN (my second role here today), I ask you to recognize that reinforcing racial, ethnic and economic barriers to affordable healthcare is unacceptable. Expanding HUSKY A eligibility is one clear step we can take towards breaking down these barriers.

I also urge you to consider the vulnerability of CT's single parent families to the coverage gap. As a student intern with Middletown Works, I work closely with single parents, service providers, employers and policymakers in Middletown to address harsh, local realities that are reflective of statewide trends: 43% of Middletown's families with children are single parent families, and 35% of these families live at or below the federal poverty level¹. Disproportionately led by women and women of color, single parent families are more vulnerable to food insecurity, housing instability and a wide array of health disparities, including the fact that single mothers are more than twice as likely to lack health insurance (13.4%) than individuals in two-parent households (6.7%)². Roughly 34% of CT's families are headed by single parents, meaning that thousands

¹ Middlesex Coalition for Children. (2016). *Middletown's children: A reference guide.*

² US Census Bureau. (2018).

of families whom you represent as legislators are particularly vulnerable to loss of health insurance.

We can do better by our people - the fact that we have raised minimum wage is proof of our intent to do so, but without addressing the negative consequences for working families' access to health insurance, our efforts will fail. Restoring eligibility rates for HUSKY A to 201% of the federal poverty level and including immigrant families in coverage are essential steps towards equity and wellbeing for CT families.

Thank you,

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