

Testimony Regarding Governor's Proposal FY 2022-2023- Budget for Human Services.

Testimony of Fatima Shah

New Haven, Connecticut

Before the Appropriations Committee

Wednesday, March 3rd 2021

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Fatima Shah and I live in New Haven, Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding the Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for Human Services.

I am writing to urge you to increase HUSKY A and D eligibility limits to 201% of the Federal Poverty Level so that low-income parents and adults can access health and dental care.

I am currently finishing my Master of Public Health degree and will be starting dental school later this year. As a public health student and future dentist I believe that access to HUSKY is important because increasing dental coverage will help reduce oral health disparities by increasing access to dental services and oral health care for those most vulnerable, specifically low income families and communities of color. These vulnerable groups are more likely to not have dental insurance and face many other barriers in accessing oral health care. The high cost of care deters people from getting regular and routine care. Lack of preventive care can lead to poor oral health outcomes.

Having dental insurance decreases the risk of avoidance of care and increases opportunities to stay healthy. This is important as poor oral health and oral health complications can exacerbate general health conditions and affect chronic disease

management. Access to comprehensive dental coverage and treatment of oral disease, specifically gum disease, can lead to better overall health and chronic disease management, lower health care costs, and fewer hospitalizations.

Children of racial and ethnic minorities living in families with low-income are a large population that does not receive the oral health care they need. In Connecticut, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other racial and ethnic minority children have a higher percentage of untreated dental decay and more frequent need for early or urgent care than White children. This is also true for children living in low-income families. Not treating dental problems in children can lead to increased risk for pain, infection, nutrition problems, tooth loss, sleep deprivation, attention problems, poor social development, and missed school days.

The first step to improving oral health outcomes and reducing disparities is to improve access to oral health care. Increasing eligibility limits will increase the likelihood that vulnerable populations, including those of low-income and racial and ethnic minorities, will have proper dental coverage. Additionally, increasing the amount parents who are insured through HUSKY A will in turn increase the likelihood that their children are insured and see a dentist early on, amplifying the impact of this coverage.

Thank you for your time,

Fatima Shah