My name is Rose Murphy, and I am a proud New Haven Public Schools teacher at Career High School. I am writing in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status.

As teachers, we are charged with improving outcomes for our students. We work to ensure that they are able to perform academically at levels that will allow them to have the future they dream of. We work to help them grow to be confident, engaged, and self-assured people. However, these efforts truly do not matter when our students and their families do not have access to medical care.

I looked back at my own medical history over the past few months to see what I would have dealt with without insurance. I had an annual physical and a flu shot-- $528. My physician sent standard bloodwork to the lab-- $1,097. I got sick and went to my doctor for a strep test-- $212-- and required 5 days of antibiotics-- $41.99. By no means are these the most shocking numbers you will hear today; I bring this up because for someone without insurance, my nearly $2000 of healthcare costs somehow represent a best-case scenario.

A reality for my undocumented students and their families is living with constant fear. I spoke to one of my students-- we'll call her Sofia-- and she said that one of her earliest memories is of her mother telling her not to get sick. She knew if she had to take Sofia or her brother to the hospital, their family wouldn't be able to afford it. After a childhood accident, Sofia's brother had to be rushed to the ER. 8 years later, Sofia's mother is still paying back that medical bill. For Sofia's family and countless others, dental care is an unattainable luxury. Her mother lost teeth because she cannot afford visits to the dentist herself. She has taken Sofia and her brother to the dentist, at great expense. Sofia is 17 now; she last went to the dentist when she was 11.

Sofia got a rash this past fall. First, she tried to Google it, to solve the problem herself. As the rash spread, she tried to hide it from her mother, because she knew she would spend money that her family does not have to get her treatment. When her mother found her rash and, worried, took her to the hospital, she was charged $3000. This situation is typical for Sofia; she said, "Every time I feel sick, I try to fight through it in case my parents want to take me to the doctor. For undocumented people, there is a dollar sign behind every normal accident, sickness, or stroke of bad luck."

For uninsured people, normal life activities can be impossible. Sofia used to have access to a clinic that would provide physicals. The clinic closed, and Sofia took a bus to another town to find their new location when she needed a physical to join her high school sports team. The clinic told her that their new location was not accepting undocumented and uninsured people. Sofia has no primary care physician; she went to an urgent care for a checkup, and was billed $400.

The state mandates that teachers like me file a report with DCF when I suspect that a child is the victim of medical neglect: the failure of a caregiver to obtain, or maintain services for necessary medical, dental or mental health care when such actions may have an adverse impact on the child. I cannot understand a system that refuses to provide basic services, knowing that of course this guarantees substandard or lacking care, which will certainly have an adverse impact on any person-- yet makes the inability to obtain these services an offense punishable by law.

We try not to think about children like Sofia, because they are children. We try not to think about people like her mother and brother, because we know that they are suffering. We make ourselves feel better by talking about things like school nurses and low-cost clinics and nonprofits. We tell ourselves that there are options available for uninsured people if they look hard enough, fill out enough forms, stand in enough lines, because we are desperate to divert responsibility for their suffering away from us-- from the people who have the power to end it-- because doing otherwise would require that we admit to ourselves that in Connecticut, we choose to uphold policies that guarantee suffering. As a state and society, we have chosen to declare, publicly and as a matter of course, that we rank people and choose who to deprive of care.

There is one last number that I want to bring up. Each public school has a yearly per pupil expenditure, or PPE-- the federal, state, and local money spent to educate each student. My school's PPE is $17,197. My undocumented students and their families do not receive a bill for this amount. Their education is considered a public service to which they are entitled, not because of where they were born or what status they have, but because they are people-- and we, as a society and a state, have chosen to agree that it is wrong and cruel to deny people an education. We have agreed that their education is a right that they deserve, and that without it they cannot have a future. We invest in a society that functions when we invest in educating the public. It is illogical and unconscionable that we do not extend that same care to the health of our undocumented brothers and sisters.