

CT doctors seek coronavirus health coverage for the undocumented 185 MDs send a request to Gov. Ned Lamont

HEALTH by ANA RADELAT APRIL 3, 2020

(Note: this effort was coordinated by the Center for Children’s Advocacy Medical-Legal Partnership. The MLP has offices in Hartford and New Haven and serves at-risk children throughout the state.)

As the federal government tries to rush billions of dollars to individuals, businesses and states to combat the coronavirus pandemic, one group has been left out – the nation’s undocumented immigrants. For a large group of Connecticut doctors, that presents a problem.

Congress has approved more than \$2 trillion to deliver direct payments to most taxpayers, vastly expand unemployment benefits, and make testing for the coronavirus free. But, while undocumented immigrants are not immune to the coronavirus crisis, they have not been included in any government benefits program, putting them at economic and health risks that will impede public health efforts to stop the spread of the virus, a group of 185 doctors say.

On Friday they [asked Gov. Ned Lamont to help undocumented immigrants](#) in the state by allowing them to enroll in HUSKY, the state’s Medicaid system, so they can receive free COVID-19 testing and treatment for the disease.

“This eligibility expansion is essential for the health of all undocumented immigrants as well as for public health and safety within our state,” their letter to Lamont and state assembly leaders said.

Without financial relief, immigrants will continue to go to work despite public health warnings to stay home, which could further spread the virus. And many immigrants are in jobs considered “essential” such as grocery store workers, home health aides and farm workers and, even if they are not undocumented, may lack access to testing and care.

During a press conference this week, President Donald Trump was asked how he thought the nation’s undocumented would survive the coronavirus crisis. The president stumbled in his answer and suggested those immigrants did not deserve help because they were taking jobs away from American citizens.

“It’s a tough thing,” Trump said. “It’s a very terrible– it’s a very sad question, I must be honest with you. But they came in illegally. And we have a lot of people that are citizens of our country that won’t be able to have jobs.”

But the doctors maintain that “without ready access to reliable healthcare, undocumented children and their families may feel uncomfortable or fearful about seeking medical care for their symptoms, and unintentionally spread COVID-19.”

“They may seek care too late, and require higher levels of care which may add to the burden healthcare systems already overwhelmed by COVID-19,” the doctors wrote.

The governor’s office did not have an immediate response to the letter.

It’s not only undocumented immigrants who don’t have health care. Legal immigrants are also failing to sign up for HUSKY because they fear it will hurt their efforts to obtain a green card or citizenship.

The “inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds” prevents a certain class of immigrants who use public services from obtaining a Green Card and a path to citizenship.

On Feb. 24, just one day before the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Americans to prepare for the spread of COVID -19, the Department of Homeland Security began enforcing its new public charge rule. That rule, upheld twice by the Supreme Court, expands the definition of those considered a public charge to Medicaid recipients and those who receive help with housing and other government services.