



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

Every physician matters, each patient counts.

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.1237/S.740 AN ACT TO ENSURE EQUITABLE
HEALTH COVERAGE FOR CHILDREN
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE FINANCING
JULY 25, 2023**

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to provide them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them to provide the best care possible. The Medical Society is committed to working for the best possible health care for every patient in the Commonwealth, regardless of immigration status. To that end, the Medical Society strives to increase access to medical care for marginalized populations, and these two bills will help accomplish that by advancing the goals of promoting health equity and increasing access to health care for all children.

Massachusetts is a leader in access to health care for children; however, significant gaps and inequities remain. Between 31,000 and 48,000 children and young adults, do not have access to comprehensive health coverage simply because of their immigration status, which most—if not all—children and young adults have no control over. Many of these children can only access care through safety net programs, which have strict limits on covered benefits or provider types. As a result, these programs do not provide the comprehensive coverage that children need. These bills would ensure that otherwise eligible children and young adults are not excluded from comprehensive MassHealth coverage simply because of their immigration status.

The Massachusetts Medical Society recognizes that access to medical care is the first step toward ensuring quality health care delivery and improved health outcomes, as barriers to quality health care have been proven to have long-term, negative impacts on children's overall physical, developmental, and behavioral wellbeing. Accordingly, the Medical Society strives for increased access to medical care, regardless of immigration status. Inadequate health coverage also puts excessive stress on families who already experience barriers to linguistically and culturally appropriate care. These

families may already face discrimination, trauma, and socioeconomic hardship, and we have seen that immigrant families have also been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inadequate coverage results in increased health system costs through emergency room visits, longer inpatient hospital stays, or more acute, intensive interventions, which in many instances, could be avoided with more inclusive coverage. At this time, as Massachusetts builds back from the COVID-19 pandemic – and especially as Governor Healey has recently declared a state of emergency as a result of an increased influx of migrants – it is more important than ever to ensure that all children in our Commonwealth can be guaranteed comprehensive health coverage that provides universal access to equitable, high-quality, continuous, affordable health care.

An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children (H.1237/S.740) would bring Massachusetts in line with California, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, Maine, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington D.C. which already offer Medicaid coverage to income-eligible children regardless of immigration status, while the Connecticut legislature recently passed a similar bill. It is time for Massachusetts to take similar action to cover all kids in our Commonwealth.

Thank you for your consideration, the Medical Society respectfully urges a favorable report on H.1237/S.740 *An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children*.