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THE KOREAN COMMUNITY
SERVICES OF METROPOLITAN
NEW YORK, INC.

뉴욕한인봉사센터
Since 1973

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2022 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Health
February 8, 2022

Testimony of Jessica Lee, Healthcare Navigator
The Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS)

As an agency that works full time with immigrants, many of whom are undocumented, we urge the Senate and Assembly to include **#Coverage4All in the One House State budgets** (A.880A/S.1572). This would create a state-funded Essential Plan, providing access to health insurance for income eligible New Yorkers who are currently excluded simply because of their immigration status.

In the third year of our battle against COVID, it's absolutely horrifying that 154,000 low-income New Yorkers statewide continue to not have access to affordable health insurance simply because of their immigration status. New York cannot afford to wait any longer to invest in the health of our residents, workers and families. Immigrants make up 54 percent of essential workers in NY, and fully 70 percent of New York's undocumented labor force work in essential businesses. These are the workers that have sustained our communities during this global pandemic.

I had talked to Ms. Chun who was in the States on a H1B visa or a work visa. Through her employer, she was able to apply for an affordable health plan that covered numerous essential medical benefits. But once COVID19 hit, she was laid off from her job and lost health coverage. At the same time, her visa was due to expire so she couldn't apply for health insurance through the New York State of Health Marketplace. To make matters worse, in early 2020, she was diagnosed with early-onset breast cancer.

She would need immediate treatment, but could not afford the expensive cancer therapy and treatment costs. She received care through the Health and Hospital (H+H) network with most of her medical costs covered by the NYC Care program, but the program has its limitations: she can only receive care in a facility within the H+H Hospital, making her commute to the hospital much longer. If she was enrolled in the state-funded Essential Plan, she could have gotten care from a local gynecologist that she has a rapport with.

Ms. Chun's case is not uncommon within our community. Those who are undocumented have very limited ways of accessing quality and affordable care which is especially crucial during a time of a pandemic. We have an opportunity to learn from other states, like California, Minnesota, and Illinois who are taking bold steps to invest in the health of their immigrant residents by establishing state-only funded programs for certain groups of immigrants, such as young people and older people. We cannot fall behind as we seek to rebuild and recover together. According to [the Citizens Budget Commission and Community Service Society](#), a \$345 million investment from our state's leaders would be a first step

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towards covering 46,000 immigrant New Yorkers, ensuring we can begin to rebuild and recover together.

Access to health care coverage improves well-being and saves lives. As compared to people with health insurance, people who are uninsured are more likely to receive an initial diagnosis in the advanced stages of a disease, die or suffer permanent impairment after an accident or sudden-onset condition, and live with a chronic condition that could be managed if diagnosed. More than 8,200 New Yorkers died from COVID-19 because they lacked health insurance coverage. We estimate that at least 2,050 of them were undocumented. Coverage for All might have saved these lives.

Effective public health responses must include everyone so that they can seek the care they need when they need it. Universal coverage, inclusive of all New Yorkers, including essential immigrants, provides a much needed safety net so that everyone can thrive. Please include A880A/S1572 in the Senate and Assembly One House budgets to ensure everyone in New York State will have access to quality, affordable health care.

We sincerely thank the members of the New York State Legislature for supporting the efforts of community-based organizations like KCS in the past. Without your support, our work for the community and assistance for at-risk individuals would not be possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our stories.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lee
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