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Victims of Health Care System Tell Their Stories at People's Public Hearing

Patients, Organizations Call for Action on Universal Health Care

Albany – Health insurance consumers testified in Albany today before a panel of state officials and legislators about their personal experiences with a broken health care system, and made recommendations as to how to fix the system in order to deliver quality, affordable health care for all New Yorkers. The *"People's Public Hearing"* was sponsored by Health Care for All New York (HCFANY), a new coalition of over 50 organizations that is urging the Governor and the Legislature to develop and enact an affordable health care program covering all New Yorkers.

"Today's hearing provides a snapshot of why New Yorkers desperately need health care reform. Our current system just doesn't work for millions of us," said Mark Hannay, Director of the Metro New York Health Care for All Campaign. "We look forward to proposals from Governor Paterson later this year that meet our standards for reform."

Last year, former Governor Eliot Spitzer established an interdepartmental "Partnership for Coverage" task force to develop universal health care proposals, which held hearings across the state in the fall. Subsequently, the state retained the Urban Institute to undertake an independent study of the major models for comprehensive health care reform. The original target dates for the completion of the study, a report on the hearings, and the submission of a health care proposal have been delayed, and Governor Paterson has not yet announced a concrete strategy to address this critical issue.

Health care consumers from Buffalo, Long Island, New York City, the Capital District, the Hudson Valley, the Southern Tier, Rochester, and Central New York testified at the hearing. Their experiences included lack of coverage, inability to get coverage for critically needed services, excessive "out-of-pocket" costs, and disparities in coverage due to race and gender.

"The cost of my health care is the one issue running my entire life," said Brooklyn resident Jim Shea, who has been disabled due to HIV since August 1994. "Everything else in my world is secondary to making sure I have enough money each month to pay for my medical expenses."

"Lobbyists representing Big Pharma and HMOs flood the halls of the Legislature day and night opposing fundamental reforms of our broken system. This hearing is designed to make sure that for once, the

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experiences and views of average New Yorkers are heard in this debate,” said Jessica Wisneski, Campaigns Director of Citizen Action of New York and the Public Policy and Education Fund.

“Our polling reveals that New Yorkers, like the rest of the nation, are demanding health care reform that yields affordable and comprehensive care for all,” said Elisabeth R. Benjamin, Director, Healthcare Restructuring Initiatives of the Community Service Society of New York (CSS). **“In fact, we found that New Yorkers ranked health reform as their top priority for elected officials by a 4 to 1 margin.”** Findings of the November 2007 Lake Research Partners and CSS poll may be obtained at: http://hcfany.typepad.com/health_care_for_all_new_y/files/lca_css_poll_results_on_healthcare_reform_affordability_in_new_york_state_feb_7_08.pdf.

HCFANY is a statewide coalition dedicated to winning affordable, comprehensive, and high-quality health care for all New York residents. HCFANY has developed these ten standards for quality, affordable health care for all against which all state health care reform proposals will be judged:

1. Everyone must have health coverage and access to health care.
2. Health coverage must be affordable to the family budget.
3. Health coverage must include comprehensive benefits to meet people’s needs.
4. Government must be an active watchdog and regulator of the health care system.
5. Health coverage must promote equity in health care utilization and outcomes.
6. Health insurance must be portable and enrolling in existing and new public health insurance programs must be administratively simple.
7. Everyone must have the choice of a public health plan.
8. Health care reform must include effective cost controls that promote quality.
9. All employers must contribute fairly to the cost of health care, and employers’ health costs must be predictable and in reasonable proportion to their total labor costs.
10. The safety-net health care delivery system must be preserved and enhanced.

The full text of the standards and a list of coalition endorsers may be obtained by visiting <http://www.hcfany.org/>. HCFANY also supports health care reform on the federal level.