

**Remarks by Joe Baker
Assistant Deputy Secretary for Health
Executive Chamber
Glens Falls Public Hearing**

Good morning, my name is Joe Baker and I am the Assistant Deputy Secretary for Health and Human Services in the Governor's Office and I want to welcome you to this hearing on behalf of Governor Eliot Spitzer. I will make a few opening remarks in a moment but first I have the distinct pleasure of introducing the people up here on this platform who will be listening to you today.

I want to start with my colleague in the Governor's Office, Lora Lefebvre, who is the Deputy Secretary for Public Finance and Local Governments.

Next, the two people who are convening these hearings and leading the Partnership for Coverage initiative, Dr. Richard Daines, Commissioner of Health, and Eric Dinallo, Superintendent of Insurance. Both the Commissioner and Superintendent will make some opening comments after mine.

We also have key staff members from the Departments of Health and Insurance: Deborah Bachrach, Deputy Commissioner of Health, who oversees the newly-formed Office of Health Insurance Programs and is the State's Medicaid Director; Troy Oeschner, Deputy Superintendent of Insurance for Health; Kathy Shure, Director of the Division of Managed Care and Program Evaluation at DOH, and Eileen Hayes, Supervising Insurance Attorney at DOI.

We are also joined by a distinguished group of citizen experts who we hope will help us to promote a productive discussion today. The experts include: James Tallon, President of the United

Hospital Fund and chair of the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured and former Chair of the Assembly Health Committee; Mark Scherzer, Legislative Counsel, New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage and a noted consumer health insurance advocate and attorney; Stan Lundine, most recently directed the Chautauqua County Health Network and, of course, is our former Lieutenant Governor and former Member of Congress and Elizabeth Moore, Partner at the Nixon Peabody law firm and former Counsel to Governor Mario Cuomo.

We are very pleased to be here in Glens Falls. Today, as the City of Glens Falls begins the celebration of its 100th anniversary (*March 13, 2008*), it is easy to see why so many are now calling it “America’s Hometown for the 21st Century.”

For any town in New York State to be a strong and viable hometown, its residents must have the opportunity to live healthy, productive lives. And one of the ways of providing that opportunity is to ensure access to affordable, high-quality health care, one of Governor Eliot Spitzer’s highest priorities.

As we work together toward making the governor’s vision a reality, there are two equally important goals that must be achieved:

One is the necessity of access to health care. Access has to do with health insurance. It also has to do with the availability of essential health services needed to improve health.

The second piece is the necessity of affordable, high-quality health care.

The Governor has directed that as we explore ways to achieve health insurance coverage for all New Yorkers, we also

find ways to improve the quality, affordability and efficiency of the health care we are buying.

This hearing today is about finding ways that we can economically extend coverage to those New Yorkers who lack health insurance and don't qualify for any of these existing programs.

The Governor is taking a building-block approach to providing coverage that ensures access to affordable, high-quality medical care for every single New Yorker. For example, Medicaid, Family Health Plus, Child Health Plus and Healthy New York are the foundation and our first job is to make sure these programs work.

In the initial stage of this effort, we are focusing on getting health insurance coverage to the 1.3 million uninsured children and adults who are eligible for state insurance programs but currently not enrolled in any of these health programs.

Reaching these families and getting them enrolled is a critical building block in our quest to achieve universal coverage.

To accomplish this we are streamlining program rules to make it easier for those that are eligible for these programs to get coverage and keep that coverage. And we are strengthening our marketing, outreach and enrollment efforts.

A second significant step in this building block approach is to allow thousands more New York children to get health insurance through the state's Child Health Plus program.

Governor Spitzer and the State Legislature provided for this expansion through legislation included in the State Budget that would expand eligibility for this program to families with incomes

up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. The current eligibility level is capped at 250 percent.

Because the funding for this program requires federal participation, New York applied for the necessary federal government approval of New York's expansion plan. But recently the federal government has created roadblocks to this plan in the form of new, more restrictive rules governing the State Children's Health Insurance Program that have been put in place by the Bush administration.

You may have read news about this and about a joint letter that recently was sent to the President by Governor Spitzer and California's Governor Schwarzenegger – urging the President to remove these obstacles and allow New York, California and other states to move forward with their initiatives to expand health insurance coverage for children.

Finally, a third step in the building block process of achieving coverage for New Yorkers involves looking at ways to provide health insurance coverage for the 1.3 million uninsured New Yorkers who do not qualify for any of New York's public health insurance programs.

There are many ways to go about this, and we hope to hear your ideas today on how this can best be accomplished.

This initiative is appropriately called the "Partnership for Coverage" because it is an initiative that involves many partners working together to make this vision a reality for New York.

These partners include government, and they include business.

They include dedicated physicians and many other health care providers.

They include professional associations and nonprofit human services agencies;

In fact, they include every New Yorker who has an interest in achieving access for all to affordable, high-quality health care.

Now, a few ground rules. The list of those testifying today was provided to you when you came in. We are pleased that interest has been strong in this hearing and that so many were able to come today to share their thoughts. It does mean however that we are going to have to keep to a fairly strict timetable. In some instances, people requested that they be permitted to testify as a panel and in a few cases we have organized people into panels. We ask that each individual or panel limit their testimony to 10 minutes so that everyone has an opportunity to speak. We will provide gentle warnings as people approach their time limit.

I will also ask that questions from panel members and department staff be succinct and to the point and that responses to those questions be the same. We will continue until everyone scheduled to testify has been heard and will be stopping just once for a brief 20 minute lunch break. People should feel free to take individuals breaks as they need them.

Again, I am glad to welcome all of you to this hearing today. We're here today to listen and to learn, and I look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions. Dr. Daines will now make some opening comments, followed by Superintendent Dinallo.