

Testimony submitted by Gloria Mattera, Co-chair, Green Party of New York State; NYC public hospital health care worker.

Hello everyone. My name is Gloria Mattera. I am co-chair of the Green Party of New York State and I have been working in the NYC public hospital system for over 20 years.

As a former candidate and current leader in the Green Party, I advocate for a single payer health care system in this country to replace the market driven, piecemeal system that costs more than any other country but provides significantly less coverage. Although the health care crisis needs a national solution, I believe that NYS can be a model for the rest of the country.

Although the knowledge I have about the efficiency and effectiveness of a publicly administered, publicly funded program comes from my political work within the universal health care movement, it is what I know in my heart, from working with low income, poor mostly undocumented children and their families, that brings me here today.

Dr. Daines has been quoted as saying health care reform in NYS should take a building block approach – not a great leap forward. Building blocks cannot be confused with a patchwork or piece meal approach. Changing health care coverage and delivery in NYS must start with a solid foundation before you start adding the blocks– a strong conviction that every resident, regardless of age, income, employment or immigration status, must be taken care of – fairly, comprehensively, and humanely.

Stretching the parameters of the current variety of publicly funded programs, tweaking the present system and mandating that individuals buy their own, bare bones coverage will just make health care coverage and access more difficult for people and continue to maintain a multi-tiered, means tested approach. The most vulnerable NY'ers will continue to suffer. And this approach will do nothing to address the issue of the underinsured – many of us who are in this room. – Paying deductibles and co-pays at the expense of other needed services and then finding out that when we are really in need of health care, if we are able to get what we need, our homes, our savings and our dignity is lost.

My work with the beautiful children and their loving parents who find their way to the city hospital system is gratifying but also frustrating and heart wrenching. Although the city health care system is resource starved, it continues for the most part, to provide medical treatment that is caring and competent. Our public hospitals and clinics should be a vital part of an improved health care delivery system.

Covering 70,000 more children by expanding eligibility for CHP is a good idea unless your child is not in the 70,000. What about the single mother from Mexico with three

young children who rushes into an emergency room, holding her baby who is gasping for breathe and cannot be resuscitated from a deadly asthma attack. Or a young teen with a foot injury that did not get immediate and adequate treatment, ends up with a life long disability. Sound like stories from the Oprah show? No, these unnecessary tragedies happen all too often, probably less than a mile from here.

Implementing a single payer system in NYS can be done (we should look to groups like Physicians for a National Health Program for example) – the people of NY say it must be done – and we say – you – the elected officials and agency heads must get it done. Or you are not truly our representatives.

The Federal government does not have the political will to stop the death toll from bombings in Iraq or the death toll from lack of health coverage and access here in the U.S. But NY is the mecca – of finance, of culture, of advertising – let’s be a leader in providing affordable, accessible, comprehensive and quality health care for all our residents – eliminating administrative waste and profits.

We need to ask what is going wrong in NYS? 2.7 million residents with no health insurance; highest per capita spending on health care in the nation and one of the highest in paid taxes. Our time has come to be the first state in the richest country in the world to restructure health care coverage and delivery.

I appreciate those who made it possible to have these series of hearings around the state. But “hearing” is not enough. Many of us here today and around the state have been giving testimony at hearings for health care, housing, good paying jobs and many other social justice issues for a long time. We are weary and skeptical but we are still in the struggle because it is the right thing to do.

“Hearing” is not the solution. We need you to listen and to act. Act to build a publicly administered, publicly financed, Medicare for all single payer health care program in NYS.

THANK YOU.

Gloria Mattera