

## **Public Hearing on New York State Universal Health Care**

Before the Partnership for Coverage, the NYS Department of Health  
& the NYS Insurance Department.

Nov. 2, 2007 at the New Yorker Hotel

My name is Barbara Warren. I am a registered nurse with a masters degree in Environmental Health Science and I am here today representing Sustainable South Bronx, a community- based organization, environmental justice organization.

Our organization is primarily concerned with promoting sustainable solutions for our community, the South Bronx. We see how environmental degradation contributes to the high prevalence of asthma and the high incidence of asthma exacerbations.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the great sanitary movement and its early leaders began to address environmental conditions as public health conditions that could be improved for the betterment of entire populations. We have lost our way related to public health by failing to ensure that all New Yorkers are able to breathe air that meets federal health-based air quality standards. Improving access to health care is an important goal but it won't provide healthy air to breathe and prevent the air pollution related premature deaths and thousands of lung and heart impairments every year in NYC.

Public health is about ensuring the conditions in which people can be healthy. Any reform of our health care system must increase the scope and authority of our public health system to take broad actions to address the health of entire populations and to respect the association of a healthy environment to the public's health, as our early 18<sup>th</sup> century public health leaders did. Population-based public health measures have been shown to be the least expensive and most cost-effective things we can do to advance public health--- yet we still have a failure of will and funding for these programs.

Our current health care system is broken. By every reasonable measure it is failing to provide adequate public health or preventive services to the population, services that we know are the most cost effective. Large numbers of the population have no reasonable access to health services and this problem disproportionately affects minority groups, those with limited incomes and those with mental health problems that impact their ability to obtain services. The health system is so dysfunctional that once individuals actually interact with the system, individual treatment too often causes further harm which results in death, disability, complications, undue suffering, infection and other iatrogenic illnesses. These problems impact those with good health insurance and have impacted me and my family personally. However in the past few years, I have not heard a single outcome from a hospitalization that was absent a major error or complication. The system is failing to provide appropriate care in a timely manner that meets reasonable standards for quality care. People cannot get into the system and once in receive poor care and are discharged at the system's whim, not when the person is properly prepared for discharge and a different level of care.

There is a fundamental injustice and immorality associated with denying access to health care. However, increasing access to a health care system that is so terribly dysfunctional should not be our only goal.

We need to ask better questions about what must change about the health system. We should not be asking what kind of insurance system we want and how can we afford it, but:

What is Wrong with the Health Care System?

What Kind of Health System do we want?

What are the Reforms needed to get there?

As environmental justice advocates, we often ask two fundamental questions that get to the bottom of systemic problems: Who bears the burden? & Who reaps the benefits?

We see clearly how many of us bear the burden. Not so visible are the multiple corporate entities that reap the benefits. We have essentially a PROFIT- Centered Health Care System. We will never have a Good Health Care System unless we address the PROFIT PROBLEM, or the GREED in the Health Care System. And given the effects of poor health on individuals, families and communities, the education system, our economy and our future, how can we afford not to Fix our Broken Health Care system?

We appreciate Commissioner Daines remarks that simply assuring access to our current health care system will not make New Yorkers healthy. We must grapple with the fact that unreasonable and ever- growing profits are not compatible with delivering quality care to New York State's population. Michael Moore has it exactly right. Health care services and hospitals began largely as charitable endeavors. How do we squeeze quality health care out of a profit-making system with multiple corporate entities ensuring that profits come first and health care last?

If we are to have a Sustainable, Quality Health Care System, the state must take a major role in regulating all of the entities involved in delivering, restricting and denying health care. As a first step, the state needs to directly provide the best public health system anywhere—investing in prevention to prevent disease and disability, and monitoring the public's health with an eye to appropriate public health interventions. Next the state must set standards for quality health care, pass regulations for proper health care delivery and enforce the quality standards, ensuring that every type of health care contact passes a minimal standard of care. Second to prevention, quality health care will avoid the illnesses, disability and high costs caused by the failings of our current system. None of which we are currently adequately monitoring.

At the same time the state needs to assure health care for all by becoming the single payer administrator for the health care system. This is the third way the state can save money

on a universal health system The state can efficiently and cost effectively enable every New Yorker that can afford it to purchase state health insurance and to subsidize those New Yorkers who cannot afford health insurance. Health care is a human right and everyone should be covered.

Our health care system is not SUSTAINABLE over the long term and must become so.

Three essential criteria of Sustainability of the Health Care System

- 1) Quality Health Care and Public Health Programs  
Health and quality improvements should be measurable. Stringent enforceable and enforced standards must become the norm to ensure quality health care.
- 2) Access & Equity for All  
Achieving Social justice should be measurable as both access to care and equitable treatment.
- 3) Cost- Effective over the Long term  
Continuous health improvements should result in dramatic cost reductions, but we must plan for continued surveillance of costs and take actions to increase cost effectiveness.