

## PARTNERSHIP FOR COVERAGE TESTIMONY

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The Rev. Thomas W. Goodhue  
Long Island Council of Churches

I am the Rev. Thomas W. Goodhue, Executive Director of the Long Island Council of Churches. Our membership includes about 800 churches in Nassau and Suffolk counties and we also have an interfaith affiliate, the Long Island Multi-Faith Forum, with representatives from 10 other faiths. Thank you for the chance to tell you what we see happening in our communities.

We help churches across our region to work together to serve those in need, particularly the poor and the working poor. Every day we see our neighbors confront terrible choices:

- Do I pay the rent or pay for my child's prescription?
- Do I go to the doctor or do I pay the utilities?
- Should I pay for health insurance even if that means that I must turn to an emergency food pantry for groceries?

More than half of the hundreds of people who come to our emergency food pantries each week need food because they cannot afford the cost of medical care. We now receive more than 1000 requests for prescription assistance each year just at our Riverhead office. Increasingly we see senior citizens who are not taking their medication or are taking only have their daily dosage to save money. We also see many mentally ill clients who have gone off medication because have no medical coverage or are awaiting Medicaid coverage. We managed, fortunately, to help one man who had been discharged from Nassau University Medical Center two and a half days earlier after spending a month in the psychiatric ward. He was growing increasingly desperate as he went from agency to agency trying to find anyone who had money to help him. When we paid for a month's supply of his medication, it cost only \$52. Imagine what another month in the psych ward would have cost the taxpayers.

As Christians, we believe that nations will be judged on the basis of how we treat "the least of these" who are our brothers and sisters--and every other major religion teaches compassion for our most vulnerable neighbors. In all our faiths, access to basic care is a fundamental human right, not something that is deserved only by children who are lucky enough to be born in a family that is well off.

The Long Island Council of Churches has long supported universal health coverage. Most of us think that the best way to achieve this would be through a single-payer, private-providers system, but we are ready to support nearly anything that moves us closer to universal coverage. We are getting precious little leadership from Washington on this issue. We hope and pray that states such as ours will lead the way.