

HEALTH CARE FOR MASSACHUSETTS CAMPAIGN

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Health Care Insurance for Massachusetts Constitutional Initiative Petition: Background & Rationale

Why a Constitutional Amendment?

Overwhelmingly, the people of Massachusetts see quality health care insurance as a necessity of life. What today's state-of-the-art medical care can achieve is undeniable. What tomorrow's care promises is thrilling.

Yet even today more than 600,000 Massachusetts residents are entirely without health care insurance coverage, and many more have inadequate coverage. Rising costs in the future will only make these numbers grow. The working poor are especially hard hit today, but many middle-income families are also feeling the pressure as costs increase and benefits reduced. Every rational person fears the loss of health insurance coverage and the health and economic catastrophes that can result.

The Committee's proposed constitutional amendment seeks to address that fear. It would force the Legislature to solve the health care insurance problem, providing it with an unambiguous mandate from the voters, on one hand, and a set of standards legislative action would have to meet on the other.

The proposed constitutional language would "lock in" any legislative action taken to ensure access to health insurance until a substitute program was enacted that met the standards. The Legislature would always be free to alter to meet changing circumstances so long as the basic tenets of the policy remain satisfied: comprehensive coverage, affordability and equitable financing.

What is Proposed?

The amendment would make it the policy of the Commonwealth that no resident go without comprehensive, equitably financed, and affordable health care insurance, and would require the legislature and the governor to implement this policy.

The Committee's proposal thus does not mandate any particular outcome, but does require legislative action satisfying the policy. The Attorney General has certified the proposed constitutional amendment and the Secretary of State has forwarded the proposed constitutional amendment to the legislature.

Why an Amendment by Initiative?

Ordinary citizens see much debate but little action as health care costs rise. They understand that very powerful interests are dealing with very complex issues. But they know of many other countries, no richer nor more technologically advanced than the United States, where health care insurance coverage leaves no one out. Individual citizens can do little on their own. But they understand that wise collective action can help their legislators break the logjam. The Committee's amendment provides every Massachusetts voter with the opportunity to send a clear message to their representatives that they want action now.

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