

TESTIMONY OF REVEREND RICHARD RICHARDSON
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The Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston
Children's Services of Roxbury, Inc.
Boston, MA

To the Chairperson and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today. My name is Richard W. Richardson. I am an Ordained Minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I am also President and CEO of Children's Services of Roxbury, a child welfare agency. I have worked in the field of child welfare for almost 50 years. In addition, I have worked in both the for-profit and non-profit world.

Finally, I serve as chairman of the Political Affairs Committee of the Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston. The BMA has a membership of 80 churches from within the greater Boston area, whose primary members are African Americans, and number over 30,000 individuals and families. I am here today to offer testimony in support of H444, a petition for a Constitutional Amendment relative to the provision of Health Insurance.

First, as a representative of the - faith based community and those members of our congregations who are struggling with the cost of health care, I can assure you that the need for health care and health insurance is reaching a crisis stage. We are confronted daily by families who cannot afford adequate health insurance. Mothers and fathers attempting to get health care for themselves and their children must delay seeing a doctor until they have exhausted "home remedies" which may not work. Then they must go to the emergency room where they become the recipients of "free care" which is mandated by the federal government. In most cases, because it is free, the quality of care is questionable. Even if they get a prescription, there is no assurance that they have the ability to get it filled or refilled. The hospital emergency room has become the place of first resort rather than the last.

This presents an even more serious problem for people living in the urban areas of Boston who suffer from Asthma and other respiratory ailments. The poor air quality and the pollutants found in our neighborhoods create an even greater need for health care. Asthma is particularly high among African American families.

Second, let me be clear about something. As a reverend, I am not just a religious leader. I am also the President of Children's Services of Roxbury, a not-for-profit

child welfare agency located in Dudley Square. As an employer of more than 200 employees, many who are single parents, I witness the difficulties individuals go through in order to provide health insurance for themselves and their families. Many who take advantage of Mass Health still complain that they cannot get everything they need. Some others are fortunate to take advantage of the company's health insurance plan. However, with the rising cost of health insurance we had no other choice than to reduce our contribution from 70% to 60%. Simply put, the employee had to absorb an even greater portion of an already high premium. This shifting of cost is unfortunate

Some form of universal, affordable, health care for all, requires serious consideration if we hope to maintain a healthy, productive, and vibrant community. A broad cross-section of the African American community has come together to support this amendment. In addition, I must say that we did not come to this conclusion lightly. I never thought I would be here testify before this distinguished committee on the subject of providing affordable health care for every citizen of this Commonwealth. As members of the Black Ministerial Alliance, we face many problems in our communities, and we want to be spending all of our energies working hard on those problems. We certainly did not ask for a debate on health care and health insurance. However, the threat to our families leaves us no choice but to engage in this debate along with the members of this coalition of physicians, practitioners, and other concerned citizens. I commend Senator Wilkerson in her effort to address the disparity in health care for families of color and we stand with her in her attempt to right another wrong.

Finally, I want to mention something about the process. I realize that a constitutional amendment is a difficult and long process and due consideration given before the final decision is rendered. However, after we have exhausted all means to control the soaring cost of health care, then we have no other choice than to let those who are hurt the most decide their own fate.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent the BMA and its membership