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**Constitutional Amendment for Affordable Health Insurance  
Testimony by Anne Shuhler  
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Good morning. My name is Anne Shuhler and I am a co-owner of Classic Copy & Printing in Cambridge. Thank you for taking your time to listen to my experience as a small business owner dealing with the run away cost of health care in this state.

I believe we, as a state, should make it possible for everyone in Massachusetts to have access to affordable health insurance. It would be nice if our federal government would do it, but they haven't. Our friends in Maine have taken the initiative and are working on ways for their state to grapple with rising health care costs and lack of coverage. As a small business owner in this state paying increasing premiums for my self and my staff, I think it is time to act.

I co-own a small retail and commercial printing company with 15 employees. My single biggest non-printing related cost today is health care. I value my employees and believe that providing the best health coverage I can is an employer's responsibility – but it's becoming more difficult to meet each year. In the present system the only reasonable way to get health care insurance is through your employer. Because of this I would not want to work somewhere that did not provide health coverage, would you?

Small business health insurance premiums in Massachusetts have been soaring for years. You need to remember that when the average premium hike is 15 percent they are more like 30 percent for small businesses. Over the last 5 years my company's health insurance premiums went up over 60 percent. This would have been more, but we down graded our policy this last year.

In 1999 we paid \$185 each month per employee and asked them to contribute 25 percent for their coverage. This year, in order to hold insurance costs to \$300 per employee, I had to change plans and cut benefits. Switching plans saved me 10 percent, but took 80 hours of talking with brokers and different plans, comparing benefits packages and figuring out how each change would affect my employees' lives. To make it all work, I had to ask my employees to pay a larger share, 30 percent each month. We all have coverage but we are all, quite literally, paying more and getting less.

If you truly believe that small businesses are the engine of the economy and having good jobs make the economy go – we have a problem when at this point I'm paying as much for health insurance as to lease my copiers each year.

I'm not alone. All businesses, particularly small businesses, are faced with harder and harder choices as premiums go up each year. I'm constantly in the position of choosing between investing in the employees that make my business successful today and investing in growing my business so it will continue to be successful in the future. Can I give raises this year? Can I buy new equipment? Can I offer the new services I need to keep my business profitable? Increasingly, the rising costs of premiums are driving business decisions even when they're not good for business.

Rising premiums and cost shifting also burdens my employees – and it's not a burden they share equally. Not all my employees get the same wage but they have the same deduction for health care. A plan we did not choose had different deductibles based on what hospitals you use. Many of my employees live near teaching hospitals and therefore would have had to pay higher deductibles to use their "local" hospital or doctors. Other employees would have had lower deductibles using their closest hospital because they live in the suburbs.

My new job as their employer is to "educate" them on the proper use of health care resources. I'm not a doctor or a nurse and I don't have a human resources department to run wellness programs for my staff. All the same, I'm their new gatekeeper to the health care system. If my staff uses the emergency room "too much" or visits the doctor "too often" all our premiums rise the following year. The system discriminates against older workers because this drives up your company's premium. In this case older means anyone over 28 years of age!

As an employer I can't subsidize my lower-income employees without raising my prices for printing and copying – and I can't raise my prices in this market without losing business. As a small employer, I can't get large group rates. As one employer, I can't control the costs of the entire health care system. I can't even get reliable information to figure out which is the best deal for my employees.

Skyrocketing premiums have caused a lot of debate – but there hasn't been much action. Although I was relieved to hear my premiums would only go up 30 percent instead of 32 percent because the State caps small group premium hikes, we need to do better than that if we want small businesses to grow and create jobs.

It's time for some fundamental reforms ensure everyone can get the care they need at a reasonable price.

I strongly support the proposed amendment to our state constitutional to make sure everyone in Massachusetts can get affordable, comprehensive health insurance. We need a catalyst to get everyone to the table to rationalize our health care system so it works for people, for employers and for our economy.

Thank you.