

HEALTH CARE FOR MASSACHUSETTS CAMPAIGN

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE PASSES FIRST TEST

Today's Vote in ConCon Moves Issue Closer to 2006 Ballot

(BOSTON, July 14, 2004)—The Health Care for Massachusetts Campaign (HCMC) today celebrated its first victory in a string of expected wins on the way to putting the issue of health care access in front of the state's voters in November 2006.

153 legislators voted for the measure today, 103 more than required.

The Amendment that won today would require the state to make sure every Massachusetts resident can get affordable coverage for medically necessary health and mental health care services including prescription drugs. As a ballot petition, sent to the Legislature by 71,385 registered voters, it needed only 50 legislators to vote "yes" today to move on to the next step – a "yes" vote in the 2005-2006 Constitutional Convention.

"Today is a great day for every Massachusetts residents, insured and uninsured alike," said Barbara Roop, co-chair of the HCMC. "For those with insurance, this Amendment will make sure they will still be able to afford it one year or twenty years from now; for the uninsured, this Amendment will start the process in earnest of designing a health care system that ensures them access to high quality health care and really works for patients, providers, employers and taxpayers alike," she added.

"With the passage of this Amendment today, we will spark the debate for reforms to guarantee every Massachusetts resident access to high quality, cost-effective care when they need it and to end the cost shifting responsible for the skyrocketing premiums that are rapidly pricing middle income, working families and small and medium sized employers out of the insurance market," Roop said.

"We are very grateful to our co-sponsors," she added. "Their early leadership and willingness to put their support in writing is an invaluable service to all Massachusetts residents and to the Commonwealth's economy. They were joined by many other legislators who voted "yes" today to address the No. 1 worry of their constituents – the affordability of health insurance."

The Constitutional Amendment requires elected officials to reform, with stakeholder input, our health care system to ensure access to affordable health insurance for all residents – the key to getting the high quality care that will over time reduce costs. Reputable studies show these reforms can be paid for by redirecting money already spent on care for the uninsured and wasted on

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complicated and burdensome bureaucracies. These changes will mean getting better value for our health care dollar by using current dollars for direct investments in the health and welfare of all Massachusetts residents and in the vitality of our health care economy.

Supporters of the measure point to several reasons why its passage is necessary, including:

- Skyrocketing premiums that are rapidly making health coverage unaffordable for middle income families and for small and medium-sized employers which, in turn, threatens the financial stability of Massachusetts families and of the health care system which accounts for almost 25% of our economy.
- Rapidly growing uninsurance rates that threaten the health and financial well-being of Massachusetts families and fuel huge disparities in health outcomes in communities of color.
- The failure to develop a legislative approach to universal coverage after over a decade of debate.

“I believe this measure is one of the most important health care proposals to ever come before the Legislature,” Representative Speliotis said. “We have enacted some very important initiatives in health care access—we have expanded care for kids and we have worked on prescription drug help for the elderly. But, these advances are threatened by our failure to include everyone. The time has come for us to get serious and make sure no one goes without health care. Period,” he added.

“Action is needed now to end the profound injustice of excluding huge numbers of our friends, neighbors and co-workers from access to the high quality care most of us take for granted, thereby condemning them to live sicker lives and die younger,” said Dr. John Goodson, co-chair of the HCMC. “A strong signal has been sent to everyone who has a stake in designing a health care system that works for patients, providers, employers and taxpayers that we’re setting the table to begin the discussions that will lead to real reforms over the next few years,” Goodson added. “We are indebted to all the legislators and the countless individuals and organizations that have supported and worked tirelessly to make universal access to the highest quality care, a principle endorsed by almost 80% of Massachusetts voters, the law in Massachusetts”.

Business leaders, small business owners and health care providers have expressed support for the measure. Several small business owners testified at a hearing earlier this spring or have submitted testimony to the legislative committee reviewing the proposal, including Harold Hestnes, senior partner at Hale & Dorr; William Spring, Chairman of the Youth Committee of the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board; and Nick Littlefield, senior partner at Foley Hoag; They were joined by a cross-section of community leaders and health care providers, including Peter Slavin, CEO, Massachusetts General Hospital; Reverend Richard Richardson, Black Ministerial Alliance; and Karen Higgins, President, Massachusetts Nurses Association.

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The text of the Amendment reads:

Upon ratification of this amendment and thereafter, it shall be the obligation and duty of the Legislature and executive officials, on behalf of the Commonwealth, to enact and implement such laws, subject to approval by the voters at a state wide election, as will ensure that no Massachusetts resident lacks comprehensive, affordable, and equitably financed health insurance coverage for all medically necessary preventive, acute and chronic health care and mental health care services, prescription drugs and devices.

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