

MASSACHUSETTS LABOR FOR HEALTH CARE

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February 12, 2009

Honorable Barack Obama, President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We applaud your commitment to enact legislation that will improve health care in the United States. Health care continues to be a critical issue for workers at the bargaining table and -- as the crisis in the auto industry shows -- without a real solution responsible employers lose their competitive edge while employees suffer.

The undersigned labor leaders from Massachusetts, ask that you pursue a strong agenda for national, universal, publicly-funded health care as the best solution to address out-of-control health care costs and unacceptable levels of health care disparities.

The best way to achieve your goals of universality, quality, and cost effectiveness is a national program based on improving and expanding Medicare to cover everyone. This would be accomplished by passing HR 676, the "Medicare for all" legislation.

Although much-touted by some policy makers in Washington, the Massachusetts Plan has failed to address our concerns about costs and disparities and in some cases, has even made them worse.

The chief problem with the Massachusetts plan is that it leaves private insurance companies at the center of the system through an individual mandate and expensive public subsidies supported by taxes for plans that still don't provide enough coverage.

The law is too expensive for many individuals forced to buy health insurance. It has failed to control costs and it has cost the state far more than initially projected. As a result, many critical health care facilities that serve low-income communities are facing huge cuts, while health care premiums continue to rise by double digits year after year. The Massachusetts Plan is widely recognized as unsustainable and now that we are facing an economic crisis, it is even more problematic.

As John Sweeney, President of the AFL-CIO has said, "Who would have thought that Massachusetts ... would take a page out of the Newt Gingrich playbook for health care reform? Forcing uninsured workers to purchase health care coverage or face higher taxes and fines is the cornerstone of Mr. Gingrich's health care reform proposals. And it is unconscionable that Massachusetts has adopted this misguided individual mandate."

We are part of a growing number of labor leaders in the labor movement who support HR 676, the "Medicare for All" bill, that is very similar to previous efforts sponsored by our own Senator Edward Kennedy. We believe that, given the lessons of Massachusetts, this approach is the most fiscally prudent and morally imperative direction for successful health care reform.

We thank you in advance for your commitment to health care reform and look forward to working with you to make it a reality.

Sincerely,

Pauline Arguin, President, UE Local 204, Esterline Ind., Haskon Div., Taunton, MA

Barbara Beckwith and Charles Coe, Co-chairs, National Writers Union / UAW, Boston Chapter

Alex Brown, Vice President, IUE-CWA Local 201, Lynn, MA

Myles Calvey, Business Manager, IBEW Local 2222, Dorchester, MA

Jeff Crosby, President, North Shore Labor Council, AFL-CIO, Lynn, MA

Russ Davis, Director, Massachusetts Jobs with Justice, Boston, MA

Wilfred "Willie" Desnoyers, President, UAW MA State CAP Council

Sandy Eaton, Chair, Mass Nurses Association Region 5, Canton, MA

James Foley, Business Rep., IAMAW District 15, Boston, MA

Chris Folsom, Chair, Mass Nurses Association Region 1, Northampton, MA

Paul Georges, President, Merrimack Valley Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, Lowell, MA

Mark Govoni, V.P. & Political Director, UFCW Local 1445, Dedham, MA

Fiore Grassetti, President Hampshire Franklin Labor Council, AFL-CIO, Northampton, MA

Donna Johnson, President, University Staff Association/MTA, UMass Amherst, MA

Donald Keith, President, UE Local 269, Erving Paper Co., Erving MA

John Kelly, President, IBEW Local 2321, North Andover, MA

Peter Knowlton, District President, UE Northeast Region, Taunton, MA

Stephen Lewis, Treasurer, SEIU Local 509, Watertown, MA

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Randall Phillis, President, Massachusetts Society of Professor/MTA, Amherst, MA

Beth Piknick, President, Mass Nurses Association, Canton, MA

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Julie Pinkham, Executive Director, Mass Nurses Association, Canton, MA

Frank Rigiero, National Business Agent, American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO, Worcester, MA

Cynthia Rodrigues, President Greater Southeastern Massachusetts Labor Council, AFL-CIO, New Bedford, MA

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Stephanie Stevens, Chair, Mass Nurses Association Region 3, Sandwich, MA

Richard Stutman, President, Boston Teachers Union, AFT, Boston, MA

Daniel B. Totten, President, Boston Newspaper Guild, TNG-CWA Local 31245

Don Tremontozzi, President, CWA Local 1400, Boston, MA

Gael Wakefield, President, UE Local 274: Franklin County, Greenfield, MA

Jon Weissman, Secr-Treas, Pioneer Valley Labor Council, AFL-CIO, Springfield, MA

Brian Zahn, Chair, Mass Nurses Assoc. Region 4, Peabody, MA

cc: Senator Edward Kennedy
Senator John Kerry
Massachusetts Congressional delegation

** Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only.*