

**TESTIMONY**

**New York State Assembly Public Hearing:  
How to Increase Health Insurance  
Coverage in New York State**

by

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## **Testimony on Universal Access to Health Care Coverage in New York State**

Good afternoon. My name is Robb Smith and I am Executive Director of Interfaith Impact of New York State. We are a coalition of clergy, congregations and individuals from liberal Protestant, Reform Jewish, Unitarian Universalist and other progressive faith traditions across the state. We advocate for compassion and justice in state policies.

I am here today because our current system of health care coverage is fragmented, rent by unjust inequities, and overburdened with wasteful administrative costs. Every day, individuals and families in our congregations confront the devastating results of these dysfunctions.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane." Yet inequality is rampant in New York State's health care system and right now, millions of New Yorkers go without access to quality health care and hundreds die each year because they can not get the care they need.

Our common faith traditions agree on the worth and dignity of every individual, and the New York State Constitution makes it clear that people should not be treated as a commodity. Universal access to quality health care needs to be approached as a fundamental right, not a luxury. As a society, we should not market health care services as though they were something to be purchased like shoes or flower pots. None of us can choose when we need heart bypass surgery, diabetes treatment or radiation therapy. Preventive and remedial health care services, available to all, are essential to the well-being of society.

The availability and affordability of quality health care services requires accessibility to health insurance. These services should include pre-natal and comprehensive reproductive health care in appropriate settings, including full-service hospitals across the state.

Six years ago, Interfaith IMPACT of NYS strongly supported Family Health Plus, which today provides essential services to thousands of New Yorkers. Today, we support the Assembly's effort to find ways to extend essential coverage to all.

More recently, we have supported the creation of a commission that would examine, evaluate and make recommendations concerning possible methods of providing comprehensive, affordable, quality health care to all New Yorkers while controlling costs and ensuring freedom of choice for consumers. The commission would solicit input from the general public, advocacy groups, health care providers, organized labor and other stakeholders in the health care system and then submit a report to the legislature with its recommendations. A similar model has been used successfully in other states, including Maine and Maryland.

As health care system benchmarks, we hold out for your consideration two related models that have worked well over the years: first, Medicare, which provides a model for both efficiency and fairness; second, universal coverage from a single financial pool, which appears to offer massive financial savings.

“Heal the hurt of my people” is a Biblical mandate. Bringing healing to the sick is one of the basic human obligations, as attested to by both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. As individuals of faith, we have a duty to help ensure that basic health care is available to each and every resident of New York State. Financially, socially and ethically, we cannot afford to do otherwise.

On behalf of our member congregations, clergy and individuals of faith across this great state, we call on our elected officials and health care providers to make universal access to health care a reality within the next five years. We pray that as you struggle with the moral and financial questions posed by providing access to health care coverage, you will continue to hear a call to compassion, that clear voice of truth that lies at the heart of all the world's sacred teachings.

If we and you have the courage to answer, then together, we can create a health care system that delivers for all the people of New York State.

Thank you for consideration.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY  
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