

Healthcare is a Human Right Campaign



Senate Committee on Health and Welfare Peg Franzen Testimony, Thursday, March 31, 2011

I am Peg Franzen, president of the Vermont Workers' Center and member of the Healthcare Is a Human Right Campaign. I want to thank you for inviting Vermonters here tonight to participate in this important democratic process. We are here to create a universal healthcare system that works for all of us. This is a historic opportunity to improve the lives of all Vermonters and to lead the country in making the human right to healthcare a reality.

I'm also here tonight on behalf of many thousands of Vermonters who have spoken out about the pain and suffering, the indignity and abuse, this healthcare crisis has inflicted on them. Too many Vermonters are unable to get the healthcare they need, have gone bankrupt due to medical bills, and have paid with their health - and some even with their lives. Our broken healthcare system has caused a human rights emergency. Ending this emergency must be our foremost goal as we debate how to move forward.

Vermonters have struggled for a long time to get universal healthcare in our state. We have been denied care by insurance companies and flooded with their bills; we have signed petitions, organized people's forums and taken to the streets. I am proud to say that the Healthcare Is a Human Right Campaign has been able to change what is politically possible. That's why we're here tonight. This bill wouldn't exist without Vermonters from all walks of life, and from every corner of the state, standing up for our human right to healthcare. We are not daunted by political obstacles and we are not bound by special interests. We are a grassroots movement of Vermonters and we won't rest until we get a universal healthcare system that provides healthcare as a public good for all.

With the bill now before us, universal healthcare is finally within our reach. This bill is a roadmap to get us there. Passing this bill is no more than a first step, which we must take with care - but we must take it now.

As we go down this road, we must be guided by the plight of Vermonters who pay for the failures of this market-based system with their health. Human rights principles offer that guidance, and they are included in this bill as the foundation of our new healthcare system. The bill says that every Vermonter must have access to healthcare. It says that we must be treated equally, regardless of how much money we have. These are the human rights principles of universality and equity. The bill also commits the state to ensure accountability, transparency and participation in the new system, so that the people have the say, not the insurance companies.

With these principles we will ensure that each step we take towards a new system is a step in the right direction, the direction of a universal, equitable healthcare system that works for all of

us. I urge Senators to make these human rights principles the basis of their debate. The Healthcare Is a Human Right campaign will support a bill that meets human rights standards.

I also urge Senators to strengthen this bill by making sure that private insurance companies can no longer be in the driver's seat. Their business model is to restrict our access to care; that's how they make money. This bill must lead us to a publicly financed and administered system that provides healthcare as a public good.

I ask Senators to review, improve, and then pass this bill. I trust that you will be guided by our human rights obligations to each other, to our community, to every Vermonter. What some see only as a financial crisis is primarily a deeply human crisis, causing needless suffering. I know that you are committed, as we are, to ending this crisis.