



Testimony of United Way of New York City

Public Hearing

New York State Partnership for Coverage

November 2, 2007

New York City

Good afternoon Commissioner Daines, Superintendent Dinallo and eminent members of the panel.

On behalf of the United Way of New York City, the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association we would like to thank the Partnership for Coverage for convening these important state-wide hearings to discuss healthcare insurance access and universal coverage for New Yorkers.

New York City is a place of great diversity, opportunity and leadership in creative and innovative social welfare programs and public policy. New York City is also a place where 1.7 million residents lives in poverty, the life expectancy gap between the wealthiest and most impoverished communities is nearly 8 years, and where there are more than 15 of the 42 neighborhoods where at least 30% of residents are uninsured. In 2006 inpatient and outpatient bad debt and charity care cost New York City hospitals nearly \$2 billion dollars. We also know that within New York City only 37% of working poor individuals and families receives health insurance through their employers. Moreover, in a recent publication of the Journal of the American Medical Association, it was stated that “income is a significant determinant of health” and “income losses that compel greater stringency, such as limiting or forgoing insurance of medical care, have predictable immediate health consequences.”

These statistics are heard on a regular basis. Individuals and families struggling to get by without health insurance are unfortunately nothing new. What is new is what the United Way of New York City, the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association are proposing through an exciting collaboration. Our three respective organizations acknowledge and are prepared to engage in a strategic approach to address the gravity of the many issues associated with a lack of health insurance, including but not limited to, lack of access to quality health service delivery models, limited health literacy, education and preventive care options, and difficulty in accessing public health benefits.

United Way of New York City serves New Yorker's in all boroughs through our education, economic independence, homelessness prevention, and access to healthcare programs. The American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association provide research, education, advocacy and service. Collectively, our goal is to address the health disparities within New York City by minimizing public health silos, leveraging financial and programmatic resources, and increasing awareness in un-served and under-served communities. Through an extensive network of community-based and social service agencies, individuals and families are provided with culturally competent, linguistically appropriate, comprehensive, holistic preventive and primary care services that enable and encourage linkages for healthcare insurance access. We believe that the four-pronged approach of provider education, patient information, policy and advocacy will increase communities' access to care and coverage.

In order to support our efforts, we urge the State to commit to several specific goals:

- Ensuring Federally Qualified Health Centers have sustainable funding for community engagement and outreach and trained staff for public health benefits enrollment;
- Simplifying the public health benefits enrollment processes;
- As recommended by Commissioner Daines, streamlining income eligibility categories;
- Improving enrollment and retention strategies for public health benefit programs;

- Ensuring the \$75 million portion of Federal State Health Reform Partnership monies set aside for ambulatory and primary care are secure and that a portion of those dollars be channeled back into Federally Qualified Health Centers;
- Further expansion of Family Health Plus to small businesses ; and the
- Expansion of SCHIP

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in healthcare is the most shocking and inhumane.” We commend Governor Spitzer, Commissioner Daines, Superintendent Dinallo, the Partnership for Coverage, and all those here today and those that have participated in previous hearings for ensuring that voices remain heard and we restore justice and humanity to the more than 2.7 million New Yorkers who do not have access to health insurance.

Thank you.