

My name is Ronniesha Butler and I am speaking on behalf of the Tompkins County Workers' Center of Ithaca, NY. The mission of The Tompkins County Worker's Center is to stand up with all people who have been treated unfairly at work in housing, health care or other social or economic issues. We support, advocate for, and seek to empower to create a more just community and world. I am here today to talk about health care for all.

A list of a few facts:

- 1.) Millions of working and middle-class people in New York State and across the nation are struggling with high rising costs and lack of, access to healthcare.
- 2.) The largest single cause of bankruptcy is health care costs. 50% of individual bankruptcies are due to healthcare.
- 3.) The United States spends \$2.2 trillion dollars per year (about \$7,000 per citizen), yet, millions of people are still not covered or receiving the care they need.
- 4.) A statewide, tax-funded healthcare system, by sharply reducing administrative costs and excess profits, would provide quality healthcare coverage to all New Yorkers for less than the total we now spend.
- 5.) Today, 47 million Americans have no health insurance, 80 million have insufficient healthcare benefits, 80% of uninsured have jobs but no healthcare and 18,000 people die each year due to lack of insurance.

I know the effects of these realities all too well. A year ago my son Christopher became ill for the first time in his life. It was a very traumatic time for the both of us. We did not have any health insurance, as my job did not pay enough for me to afford it. I was in the process of working with the Department of Social Services to obtain Medicaid for both my son and I. I was informed that my income exceeded the income guideline to obtain it. At that time, I was making \$8 an hour working as a grill cook for American Food and Vending. I was told that I was eligible for Medicaid but my child was not because I made \$13 dollars over the income guideline. I then had to figure a way to fix my income so that I could fit into the bracket. I thought it through and I began to come into work 5-10 minutes late each week or try to finish up 5-10 minutes early. The difference was actually an hour and a half per month. I tried to reapply a month later for medical assistance for my son, but I was told by my caseworker that the calculation was based on the original statement by my employer. This stated that I was a full-time employee working 40 hours per week. I could not base my new application on the then current pay stub.

In early December, my son Christopher became sick. It began as a common cold with cough. I gave him some Tylenol that night and sent him to school the following day. I knew that I could not afford to send him to the hospital or Convenient Care because I did not have insurance for him. The following week he began to get worse. Eventually, I had to take the week off of work to nurse him, missing an entire week of pay, and he did not get better.

At that point, I knew that it was time to take him to be seen at the hospital. I took him to Convenient Care and was told that he had a common cold and to take him home and give

him cough medicine. After two days, I took him back because I knew that it was no simple cold. I demanded that they perform tests, which cost me more money and they found that he had a sinus infection. I had to then pay for his Amoxicillin out of pocket. Since he had never been sick before, I did not know that he was allergic to Amoxicillin. He became very weak and lethargic and vomited a lot. I then had to take him back to Convenient Care and I was informed that he was allergic to the drug. So in all, I had to have him seen three times in one week and the costs were all out of pocket.

It was at that moment that I felt hopeless and wished that I had insurance for him. I may have been able to ward off the infection if he had been seen a lot sooner. I had to make the decision to either nurse him or pay my bills for that month and no one should ever be in that position. No one should ever have to choose their family's health over bills.

The Workers' Center is committed to working for a Single Payer system to ensure that all workers and their families have comprehensive health coverage and are not put in a position of being unable to afford the premiums for insurance or of making too much money for public programs. They will not lose coverage when they switch jobs and they would have free choice of physicians and would not be forced to put off care until they have to go to the emergency room.