

HEALTH CARE FOR MASSACHUSETTS CAMPAIGN

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Medical Students Endorse Constitutional Amendment to Ensure Health Coverage for All Massachusetts Residents

January 12, 2005 (Boston, MA) — The Health Care for Massachusetts Campaign (HCMC) today announced that the **American Medical Student Association (AMSA)** has endorsed its Health Care Constitutional Amendment. The endorsement of the 50,000-member national, medical organization kicks off 2005 on the heels of the amendment campaign's major 2004 legislative victory. AMSA joins a growing list of endorsers including the Massachusetts Nurses Association, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the Black Ministerial Alliance, Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts, and the Coalition Against Poverty.

“Our members know that state-based reforms, such as the Amendment called for by the Health Care for Massachusetts Campaign, are the only real chance concerned citizens and health care advocates have right now to move the health care debate forward. Serious reform on a national level is stuck behind political wrangling in Washington, DC and proposals for band-aid solutions like drug reimportation and tort reform,” said Dr. Casey KirkHart, the AMSA's Jack Rutledge Fellow on Achieving Universal Health Care.

“We all experience the weight of the health care crisis – whether you are insured and pay astronomical premiums year after year, or if you are one of the 45 million uninsured in the US, the majority of whom work honest jobs and still get left without the health security their families need,” Dr. KirkHart continued. “The health care system is hemorrhaging and the people of Massachusetts – and the United States – need real reform now, not band-aids.”

The Amendment would require the state to make sure – one way or another – that every Massachusetts resident can get affordable coverage for medically necessary health and mental health care services including prescription drugs and devices. As a ballot petition, sent to the Legislature by 71,385 registered voters last fall, it needed only 50 legislators to vote “yes” to move on to the next step – a second “yes” vote in the 2005-06 Constitutional Convention. Over 150 legislators voted for the measure on July 14, 2004, giving it a strong send-off to the expected second vote this year.

“We are proud and excited to have the endorsement of these future doctors who even at this early stage in their careers are beginning to see first hand that a health care system that leaves people out doesn't work for patients, providers, employers or taxpayers,” said Barbara Roop, co-chair of the HCMC. “We are greatly encouraged by AMSA's support in achieving this goal, and by the recent activity on the health care front including Senate President Travaglini's proposal, and those offered by Senator Moore and Health Care for All, and by Governor Romney and the Associated Industries of Massachusetts.”

Dr. John Goodson, co-chair of the HCMC, commented, “As a medical educator, it is tremendously gratifying to see this new generation of doctors make such a powerful commitment to end one of the fundamental injustices of our society – a health care system that denies

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hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents' access to quality health care based on their ability to pay. Their commitment will mean better care for their patients throughout their professional careers," he added.

The Constitutional Amendment requires the Legislature, with stakeholder input, to reform our health care system to ensure access to affordable health insurance for all residents – the key to getting the high quality care that will over time improve health and reduce costs. Reputable studies show these reforms can be paid for by redirecting money already spent on care for the uninsured and wasted on complicated and burdensome bureaucracies. These changes will mean getting better value for our health care dollar by using current dollars for direct investments in the health and welfare of all Massachusetts residents and in the vitality of our health care economy.

Supporters of the measure point to several reasons why its passage is necessary, including:

- Skyrocketing premiums that are rapidly making health coverage unaffordable for middle income families and for small and medium-sized employers which, in turn, threatens the financial stability of Massachusetts families and of the health care system which accounts for almost 25% of our economy.
- Rapidly growing uninsurance rates that threaten the health and financial well-being of Massachusetts families and fuel huge disparities in health outcomes in communities of color.
- The failure to develop a legislative approach to universal coverage after over a decade of debate.

The text of the amendment reads:

Upon ratification of this amendment and thereafter, it shall be the obligation and duty of the Legislature and executive officials, on behalf of the Commonwealth, to enact and implement such laws, subject to approval by the voters at a state wide election, as will ensure that no Massachusetts resident lacks comprehensive, affordable, and equitably financed health insurance coverage for all medically necessary preventive, acute and chronic health care and mental health care services, prescription drugs and devices.

About AMSA

With more than a half-century history of medical student activism, American Medical Student Association (www.amsa.org) is the oldest and largest independent association of physicians-in-training in the United States. Founded in 1950, AMSA is a student-governed, non-profit organization committed to representing the concerns of physicians-in-training. AMSA began under the auspices of the American Medical Association (AMA) to provide medical students a chance to participate in organized medicine. Starting in 1960, the association refocused its energies on the problems of the medically underserved, inequities in our health-care system and related issues in medical education. With approximately 50,000 members, including medical and premedical students, residents and practicing physicians, AMSA is committed to improving medical training as well as advancing the profession of medicine.

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