

Massachusetts Labor for Health Care

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Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The health care crisis in America and Massachusetts grows deeper everyday. More than 45 million people have no health insurance, while millions more are underinsured. The rest of us face rising premiums and deductibles, a decline in the quality of care, and cuts in public programs and essential services. Health care costs have become the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the U.S., fueling fear among working families that a severe illness or a medical emergency could ruin their dream of a better life.

As working people and union members we are particularly affected. Staggering increases in health costs put union employers at a competitive disadvantage with businesses that do not provide adequate insurance to their employees. The high cost and inefficiency of the current system puts manufacturers like General Motors at a competitive disadvantage in a global economy where most other countries provide universal health care – and that means a loss of good jobs.

Across the board, workers and their unions are fighting rising costs and cuts in benefits and services:

- **Public Service Workers** – As health care costs strain municipal budgets, our benefits are often the first place state and city governments look to cut costs.
- **Private Sector** – Employers demand that we accept increased benefit costs or take cuts in wage increases, vacation time, and other improvements in order to maintain our health care.
- **Building trades, service sector, and other unions with Taft-Hartley health care plans** are fighting to maintain services amid skyrocketing cost increases.
- **Health Care Workers** – In addition to the problems that other workers face in collective bargaining, caregivers and support personnel feel the effects of the crisis everyday: longer hours, short staffing, sicker patients and a decline in the quality of care.
- **Retirees** – Employers are cutting retiree health benefits, casting aside those who built the fortunes of companies after a lifetime of hard work. This leaves former members living on fixed incomes to face skyrocketing costs for prescription drugs and health services at a time when they need them most.

We in Massachusetts have an opportunity to do something about the health crisis confronting so many working Americans. If approved by the voters, a ballot question in 2006 will guarantee that *every* Massachusetts resident has access to affordable health care as a right under our state constitution. Massachusetts Labor for Health Care, as part of the Health Care for Massachusetts Campaign (www.healthcareformass.org), is organizing to educate and mobilize union members and our allies to pass this important initiative. We are joined in this effort by *America's Agenda: Health Care for All*, a coalition of some twenty national and international unions with a mission of winning high quality, affordable health care for all Americans by first winning universal health care campaigns like ours, state by state.

We see the constitutional amendment as a strategic opportunity to reach a real solution to the health care crisis in Massachusetts. In the meantime, we will also work to have an immediate impact on health care reforms that the governor and legislature are considering. As always, we will continue to stand with any worker or union fighting to maintain their hard won health care benefits.

We hope you will join us and become a member of Massachusetts Labor for Health Care. Working together, we will win health care for everyone!

In Solidarity,

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Richard M. Brown, President,
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