



For Immediate Release
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**St. Patrick's Press Event at the Legislative Correspondents Room (LOB130)
March 17 -- 11:00 AM**

Insurance Coverage Shouldn't Be a Matter of Luck!

**Unique Coalition of Business Groups, Insurers, Providers and Health Consumers
Join Superintendent Wrynn to Call for Reinstatement of Government's Power to
Curb Health Insurance Rate Increases**

Albany, NY—Representatives from small business groups, providers, seniors, health consumers will be joined by the State Superintendent of Insurance will gather on St. Patrick's Day to urge State Lawmakers to pass a measure in the Governor's Budget Proposal that will rein in out of control insurance costs in New York State.

Over 30 groups have signed a letter to the Governor and the Legislature urging them to pass the rate reform measure this year. The letter will be released at the March 17 Albany press conference.

The unique coalition notes that health insurance premiums in New York are increasing exponentially: in the past ten years, premiums have increased 92 percent compared to only a 14 percent increase in median wages during the same period. Sky-rocketing insurance premiums make it untenable for New York's businesses to offer affordable coverage to their employees, unnecessarily burden the State's medical providers with uninsured patients, and needlessly harm individuals who can no longer afford coverage.

Speaking at the event:

New York State Superintendent of Insurance James J. Wrynn
Wally Hart, President/CEO, Fulton County Regional Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Neal Lane, AARP-NYS, Executive Council and Member
Gerry Conway, Medicaid Society of the State of New York
Lisa Scerbo, small business owner from Latham NY
Elisabeth Benjamin, Community Service Society/Health Care for All New York
Peter Slocum, American Cancer Society/HCFANY, will MC the event.

Good luck charms will be given to any attendee who is concerned that their health coverage luck may be running out...



"Deregulation of health insurance premiums has contributed to skyrocketing rates, while forcing many New Yorkers to struggle to pay more for health insurance than they should, and even drop coverage altogether," said **Insurance Superintendent James Wyrnn**. "Some of those who drop coverage end up on public programs, paid for by taxpayers. Governor Paterson's Budget for next year will reinstate the Insurance Department's authority to review health insurance premiums before insurers raise rates to ensure that the increases are not excessive. This will protect consumers and small businesses that are suffering from the cumulative impact of multiple double digit rate increases and help save the State money by limiting the number of New Yorkers who have to drop health insurance coverage and end up in public programs."

"Since 2000, when the former Prior Approval law expired, health insurance rates paid by small businesses and individuals have increased an average 13.5% per year and for 2010, rates increased across the board with averages of 17% to as high as 34 % for some policies" said **Wally Hart, President of the Fulton County Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry**, "New York's small businesses can not afford these increases and we believe Prior Approval will provide the oversight needed to advocated for fair rates for all."

"The extraordinary profits generated by the health plan industry over the last several years have been made at the expense of New York's magnificent but financially strained health care system, stated **Gerard L. Conway, Esq., Senior Vice-President for the Medical Society of the State of New York**. "At the same time, physician and hospital reimbursement has been aggressively constrained, the premiums paid by businesses to support the health care system have increased dramatically, and patient cost-sharing obligations have grown significantly. Returning the authority of the Superintendent of Insurance to review health plan premium rate requests, and increasing the minimum medical loss ratio that the companies must meet, will not only better control health insurance premium increases, it will assure that the health insurance industry is not allowed to extract grossly excessive amounts of resources from New York State's health care system in New York State and divert such resources to company dividends and profits."

"New Yorkers do not sit on pots of St. Patrick's Day gold," said **Elisabeth Benjamin, Vice President, Health Initiatives at the Community Service Society and Co-Founder Health Care For all New York**, "By contrast, well-heeled health insurance industry lobbyists our hard-earned premium dollars to buy expensive TV and print ads to intimidate the legislature against real health reform. But New Yorkers are not fooled by insurance industry myths; in the only poll of its kind, two in three New Yorkers say that they think the government should have the power to regulate insurance rate increases, and support for this measure is strongest in Upstate."

"We must stop insurance industry practices that put health care coverage out of reach for so many New Yorkers," said **Lois Aronstein, AARP New York State Director**. "A recent poll of our younger members (50-64 yrs old) shows that close to 80% said that they are worried about paying for health care insurance."

"Freelancers have struggled for a decade with rising healthcare costs in New York's unregulated insurance market," said **Sara Horowitz, President and CEO of Freelancers Insurance Company**.



“Governor Paterson’s legislation provides needed oversight. The next step is focusing on policies that help make coverage for independent workers affordable.”

"Cancer patients should not have to choose between their lives and their life-savings," says **Peter Slocum, Vice President for Advocacy at the American Cancer Society of New York and New Jersey**. "Reining in health insurance rate hikes will allow seriously ill patients, and all healthcare consumers, to focus on what matters most - getting well and staying well."

"Millions of dollars of premium overcharges have been recovered by the Insurance Department years after they occurred, but sadly this has been too late for people who could not afford to pay their premiums and lost their coverage," said **Susan Dooha, of New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage the Center for the Independence of the Disabled of New York**. "We need regulation that works before premiums are increased, not after the fact, so that consumers are not irreparably harmed."

“Three weeks ago, my sister who lives in Ulster County just found out that their family health insurance coverage will increase by almost 30% this year—a major blow to their family budget,” said **Jessica Wisneski, Legislative Director of Citizen Action of New York, a founding organization of Health Care for All New York**. “With consumers, business leaders, doctors and so many others standing together – and New York’s working families facing desperate times - the legislature must pass this bill and regulate insurance premium hikes.”

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