



August 30, 2006

Patricia Maryland, Ph.D.
Chair
Citizens' Health Care Working Group
ATTN: Comments, Interim Recommendations
7201 Wisconsin Ave., Room 575
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Dr. Maryland:

ANDREW L. STERN
International President

ANNA BURGER
International Secretary-Treasurer

MARY KAY HENRY
Executive Vice President

GERRY HUDSON
Executive Vice President

ELISEO MEDINA
Executive Vice President

TOM WOODRUFF
Executive Vice President

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Citizens' Health Care Working Group's Interim Recommendations. On behalf of the 1.8 million members of the Service Employees International Union, over half of whom work as nurses, front-line caregivers and in hospital settings, we thank you for the attention you have paid to this increasingly important issue.

SEIU is committed to the fight for quality, affordable health care for all. We have been and continue to be a national leader in this fight. Across the country, we have mobilized our members and their families around this issue that affects them so personally. Additionally, through our Americans for Health Care campaign, we are uniting working families, small business owners, seniors, health care workers, community leaders, and policy makers to find real solutions to the health care crisis. Our members and health care voters have been active participants in the hearings you have held across the country.

For the most part, the Citizens' Health Care Working Group's Interim Recommendations fall within our values and ideals. We applaud this groundbreaking process and think it has the potential to bring positive change to the lives of every American. Indeed, your recommendation that "it should be public policy that all Americans have affordable health care" must be the underlying framework for any and all health care reform.

We believe that the current employer-based health care system is not the foundation for 21st century health care reform, particularly

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given the challenges of a global economy. Building a reform separate from this system is the only way to achieve success. You have begun a crucial process towards making that change.

SEIU finds three particular aspects of your interim recommendations to be the most critical. They are as follows:

1. **This health care reform process must have a definitive timeline of no later than 2012.** Setting and keeping to a deadline for universal health care—specifically, in this case, 2012—is crucial. Keeping a strong commitment to a timeframe for this goal protects the process against incrementalism. Incremental reform is not an option. While we understand the importance—both in politics and in implementation—of phasing in reforms to achieve the goal of universal health care, a clear timeframe must be set and adhered to. With steady increases in the number of uninsured and underinsured, changes must be made now, not later.
2. **Addressing catastrophic care must be an immediate priority.** Any reform must protect patients from skyrocketing health care costs. Those people with catastrophic health problems face the highest health care bills, often causing bankruptcy. The most expensive .4% of insurance claims account for 20% of health care costs. Reforming the system to protect patients from very high health care costs is crucial. While the recommendation regarding guaranteed financial protection against very high health care costs discusses this, more attention must be paid to this problem.
3. **SEIU agrees that any health care reform must include a financing plan, and that employers, individuals and the government must share in the responsibility of financing the health care system.** As the costs of health care steadily rise, working families cannot afford to purchase health insurance on their own in today's market. The employer-based system is broken with bad actors decreasing the employers share and increasing cost sharing, often leaving workers underinsured at best. The federal health care system is overburdened with the numbers of people who are eligible for health care assistance. Shared financing among all sectors recognizes that we all have a responsibility to keep America healthy. Likewise, financial protections must be put into place for low income people, insuring that cost shifting does not occur.

In addition to these three pressing concerns directly addressing the recommendations, SEIU agrees that a core health care benefit package is imperative. In order to insure that expensive and avoidable emergency room use is limited, preventative care must be a part of a basic benefit plan.

Furthermore, any health care benefit package must insure a choice of doctors and health care plans for all participants.

Finally, long term care must be considered as a part of any health care reform. As a union comprised of health care workers from all sectors of the industry, including home health care and nursing home workers, SEIU is in a unique position to comment on the need to include long term care. This sector of the health care system is often forgotten in health care reform debates. As so much of the costs of health care can be attributed to long term care—which often includes end-of-life care—it is crucial to consider long term care in any reform.

We thank you again for this opportunity to comment on your recommendations. We applaud your efforts and determination in this ongoing work and look forward to continuing to participate in this important process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anna Burger". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "g".

Anna Burger
Secretary-Treasurer

AB:rm
OPEIU Local 2
AFL-CIO, CLC