

To the Congress-people of the State of New York:

Thank you for taking the concerns of all New Yorkers seriously by considering the New York Health Act (NYHA).

As a public health nurse who has worked in Community Health Centers in both Manhattan and Staten Island, I am acutely familiar with the unparalleled value that access to healthcare can provide in a person's life - overall, it's the difference between decent quality of life and hopelessness.

I have also worked with patients in private clinics, where even well-insured patients face boundaries to their care, due to the cloistering and withholding effects of our current private, for-profit insurance system. In this current system, nothing is straightforward or commonly known regarding the cost of healthcare services, how much or what a patient can expect their insurance to cover, or whether they are getting a fair (or at least non-predatory) deal.

When I worked full-time as a nurse I was provided with health insurance - nothing fancy, but better than what many people have access to - through my job. I also organized with my fellow workers into a labor union. I've heard it said that labor unions might be resistant to the transition to a universal healthcare system in NY, because of prior bargaining sacrifices given in exchange for better health insurance for their workers. As a former member of 1199SEIU, I don't assign much credit to this concern. In the union, we used to say, "A rising tide floats all boats." So it goes with the change to the NYHA. Next bargaining rounds, and for all thereafter, concessions will not have to be made for health insurance needs. Imagine the possible gains for workers and their bargaining partners without such a concern!

I am also a healthcare consumer. I have been on private employer-provided insurance, 1199 National Benefit Fund, NYS Managed-Medicaid, and NYS ACA private insurance. Out of all those, my best experience, hands-down, was on NYS Managed-Medicaid.

I am currently a freelancer. Before going to nursing school, I had trained my whole life to be an actor. When, after working full-time as a nurse for about 4 years, I finally took the leap and changed my life over to that of a freelancer, the question of how I would ensure that a broken leg couldn't bankrupt me and that I could keep getting basic prescription medications and regular checkups, was answered by the NYS ACA Marketplace.

But now, each year, I must re-apply through this marketplace (a process that takes upwards of 20 hours) and possibly be assigned a completely new plan, one that carries a new price-tag and changes my access to different medical services and providers. As far as consistency of care and ability to access that care - it's chaos. Due to working full-time in two temporary nursing stints last year, I'm currently paying a huge portion of my monthly income as a freelancer towards private health insurance that has such a high deductible that I end up paying out-of-pocket for almost any care I need this year. I'm being economically disincentivized towards taking care of my own health. Meanwhile, as a public health nurse, I shudder to think of the implications for statewide health, quality of life, and disease control operating within this same system.

I hope it's clear that while my story is unique, it's also universal to many New Yorkers. I assure you that someone you know and love depends - in a life or death sort of way - on reliable access to health care without barriers made of dollar signs.

The quality of life in New York State overall, thrives or dies on the winds of public health... literally. Keeping fewer people in NYS from sneezing into our wonderful air can start now. As a New Yorker who knows the true value of health coverage that is universally accessible and guaranteed for everyone, I want to put healthcare into the control of New York State, with the NYHA, signed into game-changing law, by you.

Thank you,
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