

Testimony of Mr. Farris M. Thomas, Jr.

Senator Rivera, Assembly Member Gottfried, Honored Members of Health Committees:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify for the New York Health Act.

I come to you as a former lifelong Republican. I've always supported an expansive public-sector safety net and private-sector efforts such as Episcopal Charities, the San Francisco Aids Foundation, GMHC, and Friends In Deed.

I began my career as a healthcare consultant at Booz-Allen & Hamilton, before joining Goldman, Sachs as investment banker in life sciences. Subsequently, as an entrepreneur, I built healthcare companies in the US and Southeast Asia.

I was financially comfortable, feeling safe with Cadillac insurance, and preparing to retire into a life of philanthropy.

My charmed life crashed on March 31, 2009. I was crossing a quiet NYC street, when a motorcyclist high on drugs ran a red light.

I was thrown 20 feet, and experienced near-fatal vascular trauma, with every bone of my right side, including 7 ribs, my foot, and clavicle crushed.

Wonderful doctors, nurses and therapists spent more than a year saving my life and then helping me learn to walk, talk, feed and bathe myself.

But my medical bills grew mountainous, unceasing and unforgiving, and my insurance gave out.

With counsel, I had the fortitude to navigate toward Social Security Disability. While doing so, one bill too many pushed me over the hill into bankruptcy.

Bankruptcy felt shameful. I had never known or imagined such intense humiliation. I felt I had failed myself.

My prior involvement with charitable organizations included serving on development or marketing committees, and raising funds to grow programs. I'd never engaged directly with clients.

Suddenly, overnight, I was a client. The more I sat and listened to these "others," the more I learned about their daily struggles, the more I began to see them as people and then as friends. Sometimes life kicks you hard. I began to navigate a "new normal."

Since then, I've been amazed by how many of these new friends had their lives turned upside down by our outrageously predatory and broken healthcare system.

Each of us has distinctive set of personal issues, physical challenges, financial and family concerns. For some, simply surviving is a constant struggle. None of us chose the medical catastrophes that broke us.

I believe in the free market but agree with Kenneth Arrow that healthcare is not a market. American healthcare having a for-profit payment system is a corruption that endangers individuals, families, and our public health. Rationing healthcare by income is a moral travesty.

NY Health will protect lives, change lives, and save lives. I advocate for its passage as a daily commitment, and I respectfully ask you to do the same.

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