

Kingston Public Hearing on the NY Health Act
November 25, 2019
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Good Morning. My name is Vanessa Agudelo and I am a city councilmember from the great little city of Peekskill in Westchester County.

I want to thank everyone that came out today and I especially want to thank Senator Rivera and Assemblymember Gotfried for bringing this incredibly important conversation to the Hudson Valley. We all have our own healthcare horror story and I'm glad that the people of this region will have the opportunity to have their stories heard today.

I am here because I believe healthcare is a human right and I find it unjust for any of us to live in a system that operates as though the exact opposite is true.

Now, I am fortunate enough to stand before you all today as someone who has had health insurance for most of my life. I am lucky that my parents decided to risk everything by leaving their homes in Colombia in search of better opportunities here in America and were able to make it work. I'm lucky that after working several jobs and 18 hour days my father was finally able to get his green card and find a permanent job with a mega company like Pepsi as a handy man that provided my family with, what doctors would always remind me growing up was ,exceptionally good health insurance. But people shouldn't have to rely on luck, especially for such a basic necessity such as healthcare. For me, it was not until recently that I had my first real reckoning with what is the reality of our current healthcare system. You see, prior to being elected the youngest person in Peekskill history at 25 years old, I worked for the state senate as a district representative in Manhattan. As my term started in 2018, it became very clear that my job in the city would not be compatible with my new elected position, so just one month short of turning 26, I left my job in hopes of finding something closer to home. A job search that I hoped would take less then a month took almost half a year. I remember on my 26th birthday feeling a sense of desperation, one because of my lack of employment despite my new elected (part time) position and two because I knew I could no longer rely on my father's health insurance to cover me. As someone who had grown up living with migraines and diagnosed depression, I worried every day that something bad would happen and I wouldn't have the resources to take care of myself. For those 6 months I lived a reality so many people have to live with everyday. I may have been lucky enough to find a job 6 months later but I know that there are so many young people out there just like me, that are turning 26, getting kicked off their parents' health insurance and are unable to find a full time job, nonetheless in their field. Something of such importance like the quality of your healthcare should not be dependent on employment If anything, it is this very

dependence that points to something quite insidious about our current healthcare system, and that is why we need the New York Health Act.

The New York Health Act would remove the unnecessary barriers to healthcare, and frankly a higher quality of life, that currently exist in my community. I've had the opportunity to knock on doors in our neighborhoods and have learned firsthand the obstacles residents I represent are currently facing in today's healthcare system and the stories are absolutely heartbreaking.

I've spoken to women who have felt like they have no choice but to stay in abusive relationships because it's their husband who has the health insurance. Or people who have had to stay at jobs with terrible working conditions and unfair wages just because they need the healthcare for themselves and their families. And then there are those who are uninsured. 14% of the city of Peekskill is currently uninsured. Many are people, like my parents when they first came here to this country, who are undocumented and because of this are unable to access the affordable healthcare that they need to keep themselves healthy so they can safely take care of their children, and work to put food on the table. How can we expect our communities to prosper when these basic needs are not being met?

And even those of us with healthcare are still rationing the services we acquire because of inability to afford the extra co-pays, fees, etc., Fees that most people have watched go up higher and higher year after year as our employers renew their contracts with insurance companies and wrestle with the unmanageable hike in healthcare which later inevitably creates a tense conundrum between employer and employee. A tension I've personally have had to feel as our municipality has undergone it's own union contract negotiations. No employer or employee should be placed in a position where something as critical as healthcare is used as a bargaining chip and we desperately need to change the system that allows us to do so.

So for these reason, and many more, I fully endorse the New York Health Act and hope that this legislature will do the same.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.