

October 23, 2019

**Testimony to the Joint Committee Hearing in Support for New York Health Act S.3577/A.5248**

Senator Rivera, Assembly Member Gottfried, all members of the Joint Committee, legislative staff, and allies, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the New York Health Act, aka Assembly Bill 5248 and Senate Bill 3577. Thanks to your leadership and commitment to health equity for all New Yorkers, we can enact publicly funded, truly universal health care in our State. Today's Joint Committee Hearing in the Bronx is a significant step forward to achieving that shared goal.

My name is Annette Gaudino, and I am State and Local Policy Director for Treatment Action Group. TAG is an independent, activist and community-based research and policy think tank dedicated to ending the HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and hepatitis C virus (HCV) epidemics. As a founding member of the New York State Hepatitis C Elimination Campaign, TAG successfully led community mobilization to make NY the first State to commit to hepatitis C elimination. I served on the Governor's appointed HCV Elimination Task Force, in addition to the NY State Department of Health AIDS Institute Clinical Guidelines Committees for Hepatitis Care, and Drug User Health (aka Substance User Health), and the Medical Care Criteria Committee (MCCC). In the interest of full disclosure, from 2014 to 2016 I was Statewide Coordinator for the Campaign for NY Health, where I worked with legislators and coalition partners to pass the New York Health Act in State Assembly for the first time in over 20 years, and two years running. I also come to this work as a former member of ACT UP in the early 90s, and many years of direct action organizing in the LGBT community. Finally, in addition to working as a health care advocate, I have also been a provider – a speech and swallowing therapist in skilled nursing facility (nursing home) – and am a cancer survivor.

All of this is to say that my personal and professional experience, and current role at TAG have taught me what it takes to achieve ambitious public health goals; what is lacking in the U.S. health care system that prevents us from delivering quality care at the same standard as other rich nations; and how the New York Health Act can meet our unmet needs.

Furthermore, having played a central role in catalyzing New York State's commitment to end the HIV and hepatitis C epidemics, TAG understands what it takes to achieve ambitious public health goals. We believe the New York Health Act will deliver the structural change we need—guaranteed care for all as a human right.

**TAG strongly supports the New York Health Act S.3577/A.5248, which would guarantee coverage to everyone, remove financial barriers to health care, and move our state closer to the health care system we need to better meet the needs of marginalized communities and finally end the deadly epidemics at the heart of TAG's mission.**

**The New York Health Act will guarantee that every resident has access to health care. This alleviates the fear many immigrants face navigating our overly complex health care system, and ensures that no one is denied care due to their immigration status. Guaranteed care will also help put New York on the path to true health equity, freeing time and resources to address stigma, discrimination and unconscious bias fueled by racism, sexism, homophobia and anti-trans sentiment. Guaranteed care will also reduce barriers to compassionate care faced by people who use drugs, and formerly incarcerated persons returning to their community. When care is seen as a right, rather than a "risk" to profit that must be minimized, we can begin to repair the broken social contract that is leaving so many behind.**

**The New York Health Act will sustainably fund primary care, supporting the routine care that identifies and prevents chronic conditions. Streamlined reimbursement processes will facilitate rapid access to treatment for people with HIV, HCV and TB, including PrEP and PEP for HIV prevention, and pharmacological treatments (such as buprenorphine) for opioid use disorder. The State's End the Epidemic framework for HIV has set ambitious goals for initiating anti-retroviral treatment and achievement of undetectable viral load which would be aided greatly by simplified billing and guaranteed access. Furthermore, under the current system primary care is often subsidized via revenue from rebates for expensive medications, including life sustaining HIV treatments. These perverse incentives inflate prescription drug prices and have prevented us from restructuring reimbursement to sustainably fund primary care.**

**The New York Health Act will alleviate the burden of expensive private insurance premiums for small employers like TAG, making more resources available for program activities. Employer health coverage spending as a share of payroll is up more than 50% in a decade, and many small businesses pay even higher percentages than larger companies.**

Publicly funded, guaranteed universal health care would remove many of the structural barriers to HIV, TB and HCV elimination. It's time for New York Health.



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