

**Testimony on the New York Health Act  
S. 3577 / A. 5248**

**Presented Before:**

**New York State Senate Health Committee  
Chair, Senator Gustavo Rivera**

**&**

**New York State Assembly Health Committee  
Chair, Assemblyman Richard Gottfried**

**Monday, November 25, 2019  
Kingston, NY**

**Testimony Presented by:**

**Keith Gurgui - Resident  
Town of Ulster**

Chairman Rivera, Chairman Gottfried, members of the Senate and Assembly Health Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Keith Gurgui. I am a 28-year-old lifetime resident of the town of Ulster. For nearly 10 years now, I have been living at home with the help of my parents in conjunction with 24-hour personal care, after a spinal cord injury in late 2009 left me a quadriplegic.

If it were not for the long-term services I receive, such as 24 hour personal care, occupational and physical therapy, and service coordination, I would not be here with you today. I simply would not have been able to survive at home. I would have undoubtedly been sent to a nursing home after my initial rehabilitation and who knows what would have followed.

I certainly would not have been able to enroll in college and eventually acquire my bachelors degree. I would not have been hired as a disability rights advocate where I worked for five years conducting community organizing and traveling to Albany to be a thorn in the side of your colleagues in the Senate and Assembly to make sure that they are always considering the needs of people with disabilities, and that we are here, and we are always watching.

I am here today for a very simple reason. The status quo is not sustainable. This country's health care system is inadequate, and that includes New York State's.

I am here to urge that you maintain your present course in including comprehensive long-term care services as a core component of the proposed New York Health Act.

Even with Medicaid in its current condition, I, like many others striving to succeed within the confines of the system must forgo income that we are otherwise eligible for and in turn pay less taxes than we otherwise could. Means testing in order to find out who might be eligible for Medicaid places an unnecessary but severe barrier towards employment in the way of individuals; forcing each to decide whether or not to strive to make a living or simply survive and forgo a meaningful and rewarding existence.

By ensuring healthcare to all New Yorkers from birth to death we are maximizing each and every citizens full potential by ensuring that through their health, they remain as independent and productive as possible, for as long as possible.

I know opponents of universal healthcare coverage decry it as some kind of government overreach that is antithetical to the capitalistic ideals of America, but they could not be more wrong.

Perhaps they should revisit the State Constitution, which the authors of the New York Health Act have wisely cited in order to remind us that Article 17 Section 3 of the Constitution states that, [quote] "The protection and promotion of the health of the inhabitants of the state are matters of public concern and provision therefor shall be made by the state and by such of its subdivisions and in such manner, and by such means as the legislature shall from time to time determine" [unquote].

Finally making healthcare a right for all New Yorkers is not only right, it is constitutional, and it is responsible governance. Thank you.

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