



Consumer Voices for Coverage Telephone Press Conference
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NJ Policy Perspective Report Release:
Estimated Impact of the Health Reform Bills Passed in the House and Senate on NJ

Statement of Eve Weissman, Health Care Campaign Coordinator

Good morning. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Eve Weissman. I am the Health Care Campaign Coordinator for the NJ Citizen Action Education Fund (NJCAEF). NJCAEF is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization, founded in 1983, promoting the empowerment of low- and middle-income people through research, education and training around public policy issues and direct counseling and services. We work with the State's largest citizen watchdog coalition, NJ Citizen Action, which represents over 100 affiliated organizations and over 60,000 family members across the State.

The report we are releasing today is authored by Ray Castro, Senior Policy Analyst for NJ Policy Perspective and is part of the NJ Consumer Voices for Coverage (CVC) Project, a joint initiative of Community Catalyst and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). CVC focuses on ensuring consumer concerns are represented in both state and national health care reform. The program supports the important role that state-based consumer health advocacy can play in promoting innovative and comprehensive health reform efforts. NJ CVC supports the work of the NJ For Health Care Coalition, a broad-based alliance of health care, consumer, senior, student, disability, women's, labor, faith-based, civil rights and social justice organizations working to bring guaranteed, high quality, affordable health care to all NJ residents.

The report we are releasing today, titled, ***Estimated Impact of the Health Reform Bills Passed in the House and Senate on NJ***, comes on the eve of President Obama's Health Care Reform Summit tomorrow. We applaud President Obama for his continued leadership on health care reform and his efforts **and urge all parties to get the job done now**. While we are still analyzing aspects of his proposal, we hope it will help serve to move a gridlocked Congress forward. New Jerseyans need solutions, real action and end to the partisan bickering.

The report shows how national health care reform will benefit NJ and estimates the impact of key provisions on NJ families, small businesses and the state and local economy.

For years, NJ has experienced double digit uninsurance rates, out-of-control medical costs, and some of the highest health insurance premiums in the nation. Many employers have been forced to shift health care costs to employees or drop coverage altogether. State and local

governments have curtailed essential services in order to afford the rising cost of health care. Many hospitals have gone bankrupt due to the growing number of uninsured patients or patients who cannot pay for their care.

All three proposals -- from the House, Senate and President Obama -- contain important consumer protections including that insurance companies can no longer deny coverage due to pre-existing conditions, drop coverage when you get sick, or place a lifetime limit on benefits. All three proposals help residents afford health insurance and contain measures designed to hold down costs.

The proposals also make insurance companies more accountable. In particular, the President's proposal creates a new Health Insurance Rate Authority to protect consumers from predatory rate hikes and require transparency and accountability.

While the benefits are many, challenges remain to resolve some important differences in these proposals. We urge Congress and President Obama to continue the work of moving a comprehensive national health care reform bill forward that guarantees access to quality and affordable care for all. The cost of inaction is further erosion and eventual collapse of both our health care system and economy. We have come too far to turn back now.