



Sowers of Justice

Catholic Legislative Network

**Action
Alert**

***Ask Your Representative in
the Minnesota House to
Protect Health Care for All
Minnesotans***

April 22, 2005

Background: This week, a committee in the Minnesota passed House File 1422, an omnibus bill for health care spending for the next two years. While the bill calls for new or increased investments in important categories, the funding for these programs would come from deep cuts to the state's MinnesotaCare program which offers economically vulnerable Minnesotans access to affordable health care insurance. In doing so, the bill pits different vulnerable populations against one another unnecessarily. The House can and should do more to protect all vulnerable populations in our state. The bill will likely go to the full house for a vote next week.

The fact is that MinnesotaCare serves the working poor of our state. People buy MinnesotaCare coverage. They pay premiums and copayments like most other Minnesotans. And they seek out MinnesotaCare most often because their employers offer no health insurance or health insurance that is extremely unaffordable. And the program works. Without MinnesotaCare, many will wait until they are sick to seek out care. They will turn to emergency rooms to receive that care. The care will be more expensive and uncompensated, and hospitals and other providers will pass on the costs to consumers in the form of higher premiums and property taxes.

You will hear that the decision to make these cuts is no problem because the people being cut are able bodied. Yes, they are working Minnesotans and one of the reasons they can work is that they have health care coverage. To cut them from MinnesotaCare doesn't make sense if we honor the dignity of the human person and see health care as a basic need. In fact, cutting them from MinnesotaCare means they will not have access to the health care that keeps them healthy and in the workplace.

House File 1422 is worse than the bill put forward by Governor Pawlenty. The House would reduce eligibility for more parents. Currently, an entire family is covered if its income is less than 275% of the federal poverty guideline. Both the administration and the House would maintain eligibility for children in families that earn this amount. The administration wants to limit coverage to parents in those families only if they are earning less than 190% of the federal poverty guideline. House File 1422 limits coverage to parents in families only if they are earning less than 175% of the federal poverty guideline.

House file 1422 differs in another significant way. The bill contains a provision that diverts any surplus in the Health Care Access Fund, the revenue source for MinnesotaCare, into the general fund, rather than using surpluses in that account to restore eligibility, reduce co-pays, and improve benefits. In essence, the provision would make health care cuts passed in 2003 and potentially in 2005 permanent.

If we were in more difficult economic straits, making cuts like these so that we could fund other programs might make sense. But the fact is that our state's economy and real personal income are both growing. In these circumstances, legislators should not be afraid to use all the tools at their disposal to meet the needs of vulnerable Minnesotans, including tools that raise revenue in a fair and just way based on peoples' ability to pay.

Recommended Action:

Ask your Representative in the Minnesota House to vote against any legislation that includes cuts to MinnesotaCare. Urge them to raise revenues, if necessary, so that lawmakers can avoid pitting vulnerable Minnesotans against one another.

If you need information about how to contact your Representative, Call 651-296-2146.

FFI: Call Matt at 651-291-4484