

A Witness to the Faith Community's Call for Affordable Health Care for All in support of the House Concurrent Resolution No. 22

*Testimony written in support of a legislative effort in Michigan,
and provided as a sample for use by faith advocates for health care for all.*

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FAITHFUL REFORM IN HEALTH CARE

The United States – the richest nation in the world – is home to millions of people who do not have access to needed health care. For those affected, this is a personal and medical crisis; for others it is an economic or political crisis. But because we have the capacity to solve the problem and won't, for all of us it is a moral crisis. How much longer can we live with ourselves knowing that people are living sicker and dying younger simply because they cannot get the health care they need?

As a person of faith, I believe that all of us have been created in the image of God, and in each new act of creation, we are given the sacred obligation to care for one another. That care includes tending to their health. In light of that obligation, people of faith have committed themselves to issues integral to health and to the wholeness of body and spirit.

Throughout the centuries we have been found addressing disease prevention, improving access to medical care, and making ethical choices regarding health care at all levels. Medical and teaching professionals in faith-based settings have labored to provide care and information to persons who are underserved. We have built hospitals and facilities for medical training and research. Our chaplains, counselors and clinical pastoral educators link spiritual and mental health, and provide support in times of crisis. Our congregations support substance abuse programs. We offer healing services and prayers for those broken by sickness and disease. The new clinics being established in religious facilities and the growing number of parish nurse programs around the country are indicative of our on-going commitment to health care, along with the awareness that the crisis in access to health services in our country is getting worse.

In a country where the number of uninsured and underinsured grows by millions each year, we understand that we must do more. We must decry the way we do health care in the United States. We must proclaim that a system (or non-system) that costs too much, covers too little and excludes too many is a *moral outrage*. It is time for us to commit to a path that guarantees affordable health care to everyone, regardless of their ability to pay, or their gender, or their family status, or their racial/ethnic background.

It will take all of us – individuals, families, communities, states and the federal government – working together and sharing responsibility for the health care needs of

the people who live in our country. House Concurrent Resolution No. 22 provides the opportunity for Michigan to take its place among the “states in the lead” addressing our health care crisis – states that are making advances to cover their residents in the absence of federal action for affordable health care for all.

Adopting House Concurrent Resolution No. 22 will help define a goal in Michigan that has not yet been defined nationally – the goal of guaranteeing that all of us have the health care we need. Without that goal, we stand alone in the world as the only industrialized democracy that does not make health care a right for its citizens. And, like taking a vacation to a destination unknown, until we affirm the ultimate goal of affordable health care for everyone, we will continue to struggle with how to get there. Determining where we want to be is the first – and perhaps most critical – step of the journey.

I know this journey can be expensive, but no more expensive than living with those around us whose lives are forever challenged because of minimal preventative health care, untreated illnesses/injuries and excessive school/work absences due to illness. We have the opportunity to foster new generations of healthy and productive citizens, but we will miss that opportunity if we continue to deprive millions of people of the health care they need. For people of faith, this is a question of stewardship. It’s a question of whether we are using our resources to benefit a few or to contribute to the common good in which life and health and wholeness are shared by all.

Until we as a nation agree that everyone should have needed health care, states like Michigan can design a path to getting more people covered for their health care needs. Very simply, it's the right – and moral – thing to do.