

Health Care For All

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 12, 2003

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Religious leaders question Commonwealth's commitment to health care

Calls the elimination of coverage for 10,000 immigrants unjust

(BOSTON, MA) – Regassa Sori, an immigrant from Ethiopia with a Master's Degree in Library Science and Information, is confined to a wheel chair. Since his arrival in Boston nearly two years ago, he has received treatment from Shattuck Hospital and like 10,000 of his fellow immigrants, was covered by MassHealth, the state's Medicaid program, until August. "And now I can't work and have a hard time living on my own," Regassi told religious leaders, legislators and advocates at a State House press conference. "It is my will to work and I need health care."

Ali Noorani, the newly named Executive Director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition said in response to Sori's comments, "It is imperative that the legislature passes a supplemental budget that includes health care for these 10,000 legal residents." Noorani commented, "the average immigrant contributes \$1,800 more in taxes annually than he or she ever receives in benefits and services provided by the government. We need to have healthy workers regardless of where they were born."

The 10,000 adults are lawful, tax-paying residents of the Commonwealth and include immigrants fleeing persecution in their home countries, immigrants with permission to live in the United States because conditions are unsafe in their home countries, as well as certain legal permanent residents who will not be eligible for federal benefits until five years from receiving legal permanent status.

Religious leaders including Rabbi Moshe Waldoks from the Jewish Community Relations Council and Jill Wiley representing the Council of Churches expressed dismay over the decision to cut legal immigrants' health care benefits. Joseph Doolin, Executive Director of Catholic Charities in Boston, noted, "Typically, these immigrant families receive not a dime in public assistance other than MassHealth. Most heads of households are working at least one full-time job. One problem is that among the poor, the working poor are less likely to be insured than the nonworking poor, and in my experience, immigrants are workers!"

Ruth Raczkowski, a nurse practitioner from the Boston Community Medical Group, told a story of a patient who was shot during a robbery shortly after he arrived in the United States. "He was rendered

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paraplegic and suffers from many complications of his injury and requires intensive management.” She noted that after losing his Medicaid coverage in August, he had difficulty getting supplies and prescriptions filled. Since losing his coverage, Raczkowski noted, “He has developed a large wound and because MassHealth will not pay for home care, his condition has worsened considerably. In order to get him the home nursing visits he desperately needs, we had to hospitalize him – expending even more costly resources than necessary.”

John McDonough, the Executive Director of Health Care For All, called on the legislature to restore health care benefits before the end of the legislative session on November 19. “For \$15 million we can provide health care to adults we welcomed into our country and our state and we can ensure that the providers who continue to care for them will be compensated.” McDonough added, “Most of us arrived in this country from somewhere else. We do our forefathers and foremothers a disservice by neglecting our newest residents.”

Legislators participating in this press conference included Senator Mark Montigny (D-New Bedford); Senator Jarrett Barrios (D-Cambridge); Senator Thomas McGee (D-Lynn); Representative Antonio Cabral (D-New Bedford); Representative Anne Paulsen (D-Belmont); Representative Deborah Blumer (D-Framingham); Representative Kay Khan (D-Newton); Representative Ruth Balser (D-Newton).

If you are interested in a city and town breakdown of immigrants who have lost health coverage, please contact the individuals listed above.