

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

April 1, 2003

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Hundreds Rally on Boston Common to Protest Loss of Health Care For 50,000 Call On Governor and Legislature for a 90-day Reprieve

BOSTON – Today, April 1, Health Care For All, the MassHealth Defense Group, United We Stand For Public Health and the Massachusetts Human Services Coalition sponsored a rally to protest the loss of health care for some 50,000 of Massachusetts' poorest residents.

Crowds of hundreds gathered on the Boston Common to listen to MassHealth consumers describe how important the program is to maintaining their health, their lives and careers. "50,000 people are losing health care today. What does that say about our state? Who's next?" asks wheelchair bound Jim White, a MassHealth member from Hyde Park. "MassHealth has helped me overcome my disabilities and enabled me to do lots of volunteer work. I wouldn't be able to do it without MassHealth."

MassHealth, the state Medicaid program, has suffered deep cuts over the past year. Dental benefits, eyeglasses, artificial limbs, braces, and chiropractic therapy for adults have all been eliminated. Last November, the Children's Medical Security Plan (CMSP), a state program that helps working families access basic medical services for their children, closed enrollment and reduced benefits. Today, 50,000 very low-income people lost their health care altogether. Many of the people who are losing their health care are homeless, including some who are veterans.

"How ironic that now, when our country is at war, Governor Romney has not lifted his hand to address the plight of homeless veterans who are going to lose their coverage as a result of this cut," said Robert Restuccia, Executive Director of Health Care For All. He called on the legislature to grant a 90-day reprieve in order to allow time for public officials to agree upon a better solution.

In 1996, the legislature passed a \$.25 increase in the tobacco tax and matched it with federal funds in order to expand MassHealth to low-income adults, children and people with disabilities. The 50,000 adults being cut off MassHealth today were part of this expansion.

"As Chairman of the Health Care committee and as Chairman of Senate Ways and Means, I learned about the human and financial impact of cutting health care for these very vulnerable

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people and it is unconscionable to abandon them now,” said Senator Mark Montigny, D-New Bedford. Montigny, one of the original co-sponsors of the MA Health expansions, has also filed legislation to restore MA Health Basic.

Currently MassHealth provides access to health coverage to approximately one million Massachusetts residents. It enables the most vulnerable citizens – low-income children, people with disabilities, pregnant women, people with HIV/AIDS, and the elderly – to access needed health care and treatment.

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