

Vermont Workers' Center - Healthcare Is A Human Right Campaign Vermont Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project

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Contact:

James Haslam, Director/Lead Organizer
Vermont Workers' Center
(802) 272-0882, james@workerscenter.org

Brendan O'Neill, Coordinator
VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project
802-825-1609, vtmfsp@gmail.com

Peg Franzen, President
Vermont Workers' Center
(802) 497-4892, peg@workerscenter.org

Vermonters Succeed in Restoring Principle of Universality With Passage of Universal Health Care Bill

Montpelier, VT -- Statehouse -- Members of the grassroots Healthcare Is a Human Right campaign and the VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project cheered on Tuesday, May 3, as the joint house senate committee voted to accept a reconciled version of the universal healthcare bill, H.202, which removed a provision excluding undocumented workers from health care coverage. Observers credit Vermonters' unhesitating and unflinching demand that "universal means everyone" for turning a political hot potato into a victory.

"This is a huge victory for our state, and it only happened because of the thousands of Vermonters who have been working together to make their voices heard and demand their human rights," said Peg Franzen, President of the Vermont Workers' Center, which launched the Healthcare Is a Human Right Campaign in 2008 to change what is politically possible in healthcare reform. "Everyone has a human right to healthcare, simply by virtue of being human. That's what universal healthcare is all about," said Franzen.

Just before the State Senate's passage of its version of H.202, Senators adopted the so-called "Brock-Sears" amendment that would have excluded undocumented people from participating in Vermont's future healthcare system, Green Mountain Care. That exclusion directly conflicts with the fundamental human rights principle of universality and constituted a "line-in-the-sand" issue for the campaign. It served as a rallying point for thousands of Vermonters who rejected the attempt to divide their community along lines of ethnicity or national origin.

While the joint House-Senate conference committee met, dozens of Vermonters maintained a presence in the Statehouse, staying into the night as the committee deliberated, making it clear to the conferees that Vermonters expected them to do the right thing. After days of phone calls, lobbying, grassroots organizing, and a huge rally at the state house on May 1st, where migrant farmworker Javier addressed the crowd about the discriminatory measure, the exclusionary language was struck by the committee on May 2.

Just prior to this decision, leaders of the Healthcare Is a Human Right Campaign from Bennington, Vermont, had spoken to State Senator Dick Sears, a sponsor of the amendment, who agreed to withdraw his support for the amendment and even to introduce a resolution calling for federal immigration reform. After removing the hurtful amendment, the conference committee replaced it with a requirement that the administration study the effects, both

positive and negative, of providing care to undocumented residents.

Martha Caswell of the VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project reacted, "We are pleased that lawmakers listened to their constituents, and stepped up to eliminate the bill's exclusionary language in regards to this population. This process shows that as Vermonters we are willing to stand up for inclusion, justice and human rights."

Caswell added, "While at the federal level we still have a long way to go toward achieving just immigration and health care policies, we in Vermont have an opportunity to set an example. By ensuring welcoming and inclusive communities for everyone who lives and works here, we can lead the way."

Healthcare Is a Human Right and VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project leaders are available all across the state for interview or comment. ##