

Good News About the New York Health Act (NYHA)

**By Erlend Kimmich
NWBCCC Health Justice
committee member
NYPAN People 2 People coordinator
single payer committee
DSA Health Working Group Field
Lead**

NY State Senator Gustavo Rivera, chair of the Senate Health Committee, and Amy Paulin, his counterpart in the NY State Assembly, have reintroduced the New York Health Act (NYHA) in the state legislature. Included in this latest version is language to ensure that public sector union members will not pay a nickel more than they are paying now. Another change is semantic, removing the term “medicare advantage,” which was never a reference to privatized insurance but had raised red flags with retirees for reasons we all know.

The Campaign for New York Health, the statewide coalition dedicated to passing and

implementing legislation for guaranteed, universal, single-payer healthcare in New York State, has a new Executive Director, Melanie D'Arrigo, and she has hit the ground running. She will be coordinating with coalition members, strategizing, maintaining the website, following up with new sign-ups, organizing statewide volunteer efforts, developing a lobbying calendar, and the list goes on. Luckily she has experience, a background in public health and lots of energy.

What are the prospects for passing this life-saving legislation?

The bill passed in the Assembly five times, but since Democrats gained a majority in the Senate and during the pandemic it has not been brought to a vote. We have a majority in both chambers pledging support of the bill. However, while the bill has brilliant champions like Sen. Robert Jackson and Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, there are others whose support is lukewarm. We are calling upon cosponsors to be vocal and public in their support.

We need them to tell Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie that they will be voting yes for the NYHA without wavering.

Obviously, insurance and pharmaceutical companies oppose the bill. They are profiting tremendously from the current set-up.

On the other hand, New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) nurses are our strongest and most vocal supporters and our most reliable witnesses to the plight of patients in the current system. Other unions are also on board, although there is opposition particularly in public sector unions. It's particularly ironic since the Central Labor Council website, in the issues section on health, states, *"Health care is a basic human right,"* and *"Of course, the most cost-effective and equitable way to provide quality health care is through the social insurance model ("Medicare for All"), as other industrialized countries have shown."*

Perhaps the reintroduced bill with its guarantee that public sector unions will not pay more through the tax than they are paying right now will sway leadership to support the bill. The unions are not happy with the greed of private insurance companies and the constantly climbing costs that they impose. The rank-and-file is not thrilled with network restrictions, pre-approvals and denials of needed procedures.

Three Parks has been instrumental in passing a resolution for the NYHA and making an excellent informative video on the sad state of our national healthcare, focusing in on the solution offered by the state single-payer bill. Three Parks volunteers collected a record number of petition postcards in one outing a while ago, to join the pile of about 11,000 that were delivered to Heastie and Stewart-Cousins. The Campaign for NYH looks forward to future collaborations, and we all look forward to the day when our medical decisions will be between us and our doctors without interference from insurance companies.

Volunteers for single-payer will be canvassing rank-and-file union members as they gather before stepping off in this year's Labor Day parade on Sept. 9. For more information or to RSVP, click [here](#).