



**Comments by Tracy Lawless, Pennsylvania State Campaign Coordinator
At Insure PA Now Rally, October 2, 2007**

Governor, Senator Costa, Representative Sturla, It's important that you know you are not standing here alone today. We have come from all over the commonwealth to support. We came from Zelienople, Grove City, Schuylkill County, Northumberland County, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia to support you on this bill.

I am Tracy Lawless. I represent the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute.

Today you are hearing about the actions we need to take but I am here today to talk to you about the cost of inaction. What is the cost of inaction? PHI believes that Quality Jobs bring Quality Care. We are the voice of Direct Care Workers - the home health aides, home care aides and personal care attendants that care for our elders, those with disabilities, and our loved ones who need long term care. These are the people who bathe our mothers, who feed our fathers, who care for our grandmothers, who take our brother, sister, or parents to their doctor appointments, who help others get out of bed, go to work, and contribute to society. These are the people who give independence to those we love.

I want to tell you the stories of hardship for workers without health care, and the stories of consumers who depend on that care if the direct care worker is too sick to come to work, and the stories of the employers who cannot afford to offer health insurance to their workers but face expensive and exhaustive recruitment and retention problems.

Most of us probably don't realize that the workers who provide 80 percent of the hands-on health care that long-term care consumers depend upon each day often go without health care coverage themselves. What happens then? Many direct-care workers are forced to leave the direct-care profession for better paying jobs with health benefits so they can care for themselves and their families. Who suffers? We all suffer.

But why should we give particular attention to the direct care worker and their employers who want to be able to offer health insurance but cannot afford to?

I'll tell you why! It's because we are facing a CARE GAP in Pennsylvania. We are facing a crisis far greater than covering the uninsured. We can't afford to ignore this. We must look at the cost of inaction!

Do we truly believe that our elders — and those living with disabilities or chronic conditions — deserve to live with dignity, with as much independence as possible? It will be interesting to see what attitudes and policies change in Pennsylvania as more people reach the age of 65. By the year 2030, there will be 51 percent *more* Pennsylvanian's over 65 than there are today.

So what does that mean for us now, as we consider health coverage and long-term care reform in Pennsylvania?

For starters, it involves learning more about the people who actually provide the care that tens of thousands Pennsylvanians depend upon each day to maintain their independence. As we age, many of us may come to depend on direct-care workers to maintain our self-sufficiency— whether we're living at home or in a long-term care facility. Will these direct-care workers be more valued in Pennsylvania's long-term care future than they are today? Let's hope so!

I mentioned the "care gap" emerging in Pennsylvania. There are not enough direct-care workers available to meet current needs, and the demand is growing each year. With low wages, lack of health coverage, limited training and support, and few career advancement opportunities is it any wonder? Clearly, something needs to change. Cover ALL Pennsylvanians is a step toward that change.

Under the current system, long term care employers can't afford to continue offering health insurance or don't offer it at all. And some employers might be fearful of CAP, but what is the cost of inaction to them? Governor, I was with you in Swissvale when employers told you that their biggest problem was keeping their workers. Some of these employers face turnover rates as high as 100%. Studies have shown that for each person the home care agency has to recruit, orientate, and train is \$2500 per person. CAP is \$130 a month. I say, do the math! Participating in Cover All Pennsylvanians is going to help you retain your workers, it going to help you compete in the market place, and its going to cost you less in the long run. We call this an investment!

Our legislators need to look closely at the growing "care gap" in Pennsylvania, and think ahead. We must begin attracting new workers to the field — and retain existing workers — if we are to ensure continuity of care for Pennsylvania's long-term care consumers.

Providing health coverage to these workers is *one* critical way to help stabilize and grow this essential workforce, while also ensuring the quality of care for Pennsylvania consumers.

We are fortunate to have a Governor and Legislators who had the courage to introduce the debate on health care in Pennsylvania. There are only a few others in the country who have done this. Let's hope our legislators can have the courage to pass CAP. Let's provide health care for health care workers. Let's Cover ALL Pennsylvanians. We can't afford not to!