

Mary Gerisch

All My Relations.

I use this traditional Lakota greeting as particularly appropriate to the issue of Healthcare in Vermont. We are all related, and I am here asking you to embrace our common humanity, and to act in assurance of your People's human right to healthcare.

My name is Mary Gerisch. I am from Bennington, Vermont, and am a member-leader of the Healthcare Justice Campaign of Rights and Democracy. I am here today to explain why all Vermont Healthcare Justice Voters need your help, dedication and support.

There have been articles in the press that would have us believe most of you, our elected representatives, do not feel, or believe, that healthcare is a priority for this session. I would like to think this cannot be true. Healthcare is very clearly the kind of intersectional issue that impacts every other facet of our lives. I am here to ask you to let the bond of our humanity guide you in considering just how high a priority healthcare must be.

We have seen, nationwide, an effort by those embracing the theory of austerity and scarcity to cut back on our healthcare. There was an attempt to repeal the ACA, there are cuts to federal funding for Medicaid, substance abuse rehabilitation, and almost every other aspect of healthcare that we, as humans, need. Even our neighboring state of New Hampshire embraces the work requirements for Medicaid eligibility. Please do not let these things happen in Vermont. .

Now, more than ever, we, your People, need you to know that our lives are at stake. I am remembering when, in Washington DC recently, I was protesting healthcare cuts with someone who will DIE if the Medicaid cuts go through. They cannot afford their treatment or medication without Medicaid assistance. Hundreds of thousands of people in our nation now realize the importance of healthcare to each of us, and the crisis of our healthcare system. In fact, as we hold this hearing here in Montpelier, our Senator Bernie Sanders is holding a Medicare for All event nationwide.

I present this information as a preface to describing RAD's Healthcare Justice Voter campaign, which embraces all aspects of our human right to healthcare. And to let you know how we need you- our elected representatives- to act affirmatively, prevent cuts and further implement systems that allow us to claim our right to healthcare.

We are at a divergence in the path to an equitable, safe, healthcare system for all- nationally as well as state-wide. We can either embrace our abundance and common human condition to lift up our ability to live dignified, healthy lives, or we can ignore those theories and embrace

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scarcity and austerity. RAD's HealthCare Justice Platform supports all possible advancements to our human right to healthcare, and a path to universal single payer healthcare in Vermont and nationwide. Our national platform includes support for Medicare For All, continued funding of CHIP, expansion of Medicaid, LGBTQ and reproductive health rights; access to all aspects of healthcare for each of us. We oppose any and all cuts to Medicaid, substance abuse funds or Medicare. We oppose any requirements to work in order to qualify for Medicaid, and the block granting of healthcare funds. We ask you to join us and to protect us from a system that prioritizes profits of the medical industrial /insurance complex over the public and individual health.

Here, in our own State of Vermont, we need your support more than ever before. We need you to help us move forward with all steps toward universal single payer healthcare. We need your recognition and dedication to prevent funding cuts to Medicaid, Medicare, and Substance abuse. We need you to help eliminate the suffering to your constituents endure for lack of healthcare, and protect those of us who are most vulnerable. We need you to make sure that families can care for each other during times of illness by allowing them to take Paid Family and Medical Leave. Our health and our ability to maintain it is crucial to our wellbeing as individual and families.

Please reject the faulty logic and mythology that creates these cuts on a federal level and threatens to invade even our own state of Vermont. Let us attune each other to the concept of suffering, whether we feel it personally or see it in the faces and hearts of our fellow human beings. Let us reject faulty logic on both a State and Federal level.

Notably, the supposed "reasons" for implementing a Medicaid work requirement embrace the same mythology that pervades our healthcare system. This mythology is likely based upon ignorance of what it means to truly suffer economic marginalization, and denial of that prevalent element of human suffering. That Medicaid to Work requirement embraces a philosophy and fear of scarcity. It can serve as an example of how we can change the system change awareness by both awareness and logical analysis.

One of the reasons for a Medicaid work requirement is said to be: "People who make more money are generally healthier". Let's consider that. Of course they are. They can pay for medical, dental, optical and long term care without worrying that it will mean their families won't be fed, or they can't buy their children's' Epipens. Does this logic actually make sense to anyone here?

Secondly, the argument that "People on Medicaid are more depressed than those who have full time jobs and pay for their own healthcare" would be comical if it were not so sad. Of course they are! Who wouldn't be depressed when they are suffering both economic marginalization

(for themselves and their families) AND lack of ability to access necessary healthcare? Again, does that argument make sense to any one of us here? I would think not.

And the reason I would think not is that I know you, as those charged with protecting us, the People of your State, know the pain of a family unable to care for itself, buy medicine or access mental health or substance abuse care. You are aware that the frailty of human life means that we are all subject to health needs of all kinds, however unexpected. That we all, regardless of race, ability, sexual identity or religion, are bound together in that human frailty. I think you know that a human life is worth far more than what is politically popular, and I am not sure any one of us could even imagine how to place a dollar amount on that life.

Let us please help you to throw off the mythology that “Vermont tried healthcare and it failed”. Abandon the myth that larger, for-profit medical industrial complexes will serve your People instead of a human need driven system. Let us help you on the path to true universal access to all healthcares; to put to rest the idea that human rights based legislation for healthcare related issues isn’t possible in our country. Let us help you to turn down the opportunity to embrace a mentality of fear and scarcity and to rather embrace our joint humanity with abundant compassion and justice to create systemic change. Let us, the Healthcare Justice Voters of Vermont, help you to become the Healthcare Legislators of Vermont.

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in **health care** is the most shocking and inhumane.” —
Dr. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**