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Testimony regarding S.120, “An act relating to the Joint Legislative Health Care Affordability Study Committee,” to the Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare (4/15/2021)

Rights & Democracy is a grassroots, multi-issue, member-led organization, and our mission is to bring people together to take action together to build healthy communities and make the values of our communities guide the policies of our government. We were founded in late 2015, and many of our founders in Vermont were leaders in this state’s Healthcare Is a Human Right campaign. Our members across both New Hampshire and Vermont consistently list health care as their top concern and are actively engaged in advocacy for high quality, affordable health insurance. Rights & Democracy also participates in national coalitions that advocate for universal, equitably- and publicly-financed health care programs. We believe that healthcare is a public good, and that its unaffordability is rooted in the decision to privatize and profit from what ought to be public programs.

Further, over the last two years, Rights & Democracy has been working with partners in every state in New England to build local, grassroots power across the region to win a jobs guarantee, universal healthcare, affordable housing, racial justice, and bold climate action. We are a founding member of the [Renew New England Alliance](#), a regional coalition that now includes over 150 leading grassroots organizations across six states – including frontline communities, organized labor, Indigenous tribes, environmental justice advocates, youth groups, and racial justice organizations.

As such, Rights & Democracy strongly supports S.120 and urges the committee to pass the bill quickly. There are three aspects of S.120 that I would particularly like to highlight:

- S.120 is coming at the right time. While Vermonters have needed us to take action for quite a long time, we know that the Biden Administration *now* has a very large majority of Americans on their side in pursuing more public health care program options. It is time for the states to signal that they’re prepared to work with our federal government. Work must begin immediately to build legislative support for any sweeping changes to our health care system, including any significant expansion of our public health care programs, which is why the Legislature needs to pass S.120 this session.
- The health care affordability committee as laid out in S.120 is the appropriate vehicle to jump start this very necessary public conversation. In particular, the Joint Legislative Health Care Affordability Study Committee would directly engage with Vermonters who are most adversely impacted by lack of equitable access to health care through a series of community meetings -- this is the kind of participatory and democratic community-based research that we believe is essential to the development of public policy that meets our diverse communities’ needs. If I were to offer any

recommendations to this committee, it would be to more generously resource this effort in order to ensure that every adversely impacted constituency is represented, which may sometimes require removal of any and all barriers to community participation, such as interpretation, transportation, and child care.

- We support the committee's goal to consider practical and shorter-term pathways to expand access to public health care programs -- for example, bringing more youth and those over 50, for example, into public programs -- while also more broadly reviewing Vermont's current approach to managing health care affordability. Our communities need both immediate options for reform *and* the opportunity to participate in community-led reflection on our need for more systematic reforms.