

Mike Palmer's Testimony for Public Hearing on Health Care¹

Good evening. I'm Mike Palmer, a Vermont consultant for federally qualified health centers and an advocate for universal primary care. I want to share two stories that illustrate why Vermont needs a system in which everyone has access to primary care without deductibles or copays.

My Story

Without full access to primary care, I would probably be dead or disabled. My primary care physician detected several dangerous conditions over the years, each treated in time to ward off a serious, life-threatening illness. Medicare plus Medigap allowed me to see a primary care doctor routinely, discover early that I needed a new heart valve and a pacemaker, and receive the care I needed – all without once even thinking about how I would pay for it.

My Brother's Story

For decades, my brother worked as a Special Education Advocate in Benson. Although below the poverty line himself, he often donated his services to people who couldn't afford to pay him.

He had basic Medicare but never saw a primary care physician. He likely thought he couldn't afford the out-of-pocket charges – which, truth be told, he couldn't.

Then one morning he woke up in severe pain. His urinary tract was blocked. An ambulance rushed him to UVM. He spent a week in the hospital, then watched his heart, lungs, and cognition collapse over the next three years. He died far sooner than he should have.

188,000 Vermonters don't routinely see a primary care clinician because they face deductibles of \$4,000 a year or more. They're underinsured – and, for some, my brother's story is their story too. A bill enacting universal primary care would make *my story* every Vermonter's story.

I urge you to pass a bill enacting universal primary care, beginning by commissioning a financing and operation plan as part of S.197. The lives and health of Vermonters – and Vermont's economic vitality – depend on it. Thank you.

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