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Good Morning my name is Rhona Cohen O'Brien and I am the director of CCAG's Health Care For All Coalition and I'd like to start by thanking Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and the Public Health Committee for holding this public hearing on these bills and especially Senate Bill 1 which aims at expanding access to quality health care for the residents of CT. I'd also like to thank Senator Williams for putting this bill out there, indeed if it does nothing else, it at least pushes the public debate forward from the question of *if we'll attempt to cover everyone* to a debate about *how we are to go about covering everyone*.

The Health Care For All Coalition has been struggling with both of these questions for quite some time, for I believe twenty years. And I'm glad to be here representing the 45 organizations of that coalition to struggle with you over the question of how to finally fix our broken Health Care system today. Indeed we can't wait any longer to answer this most pressing question. It seems to me that the largest problem with Senate Bill 1 is the timeframe it proposes. I think a task force could yield the benefit of allowing many voices and perspectives to collaborate, this indeed would be a uniquely American method for coping with the complex issues that we face in wrestling with broad based health care reform. However, this task force should not serve as a substitute for passing real health care reform legislation now. Indeed here I sit debating whether a task force should be created, because its creation might encourage us to sit and endlessly debate the complexities, when as I've already stated we've finally reached the tipping point, it's time to act boldly for the good of CT's people, for both their health and for the state's economy. I was reminded yesterday of an old Irish proverb that sums it up with: "You'll never plough a field by turning it over in your mind."

Sitting here in good health, with good health care coverage, I understand the urge to turn away from the problem or to offer incremental fixes but what if either of those two conditions were removed? To what lengths would you go to heal yourself or to fix a personal health care crisis? Many of the people who've come to speak today are in exactly that bind or fear they will be and are looking to you for a solution. Some people have said and will continue to say that it's better if you leave your constituent's health care to the vagaries of the private health insurance market. I disagree, I believe you are able to take on this challenge and make the difference in the lives of your constituents which they seek. To me there are two roads that are open to you all in this regard. You can either make sure that everybody gets public health insurance that leads to access to quality health care for everybody or you can find a way to coordinate or organize the way private health insurance is delivered. Studies have born out that the larger the pool, and the simpler the system the more everybody saves. So I would urge that we use and apply this knowledge to whatever solution is finally conceived.

public health care

While Senate Bill 1 points us toward the road to health care reform, it does not venture far enough on to that road. And while we sit stalled on the side of the road health care costs will continue to rise, and many people will remain under and uninsured, that is how we will all pay for our trepidation. I have a neighbor who has to pay thousands of dollars a year in premiums and still pays thousands in deductibles before he gets anything from his employer sponsored health plan. My neighbor would not benefit from Senate Bill 1 because he is ostensibly insured. While some enjoy access to our health care system others do not. Do we believe that access is a privilege reserved for some and denied to others, rather than a

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right? I don't think that we in this room believe this. Everyone in CT should have access to health care, because we all work for that right and deserve its assurance. My neighbor's story is one of so many. It's just not fair that hardworking people who are trying to be responsible for themselves by taking care of their health and the health of their family members can't afford the oftentimes devastatingly high cost of health care. We need to come together as a state, to lower the cost of quality accessible health care for everybody. Only by including everyone in the solution will the costs to our health and our economy finally come back under our common control.

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