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February 14, 2011

To Senators Crisco, Stillman and Musto and Representatives Megna, Ritter and Tercyak and members of the Insurance and Real Estate, Public Health and Human Services Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of H.B. 6305, An Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet Plan. My name is Rev. Abraham Hernandez and I am speaking on behalf of the Interfaith Fellowship for Universal Health Care, a multi-racial, multi-ethnic group of religious leaders of all faiths from throughout Connecticut who have come together because of our common belief that all people should have access to quality, affordable health care.

We have come to this building many times seeking justice for the uninsured, (including many uninsured religious leaders), seeking justice for those who have insurance but still can't afford the health care they need, seeking justice for the Latino and African American people who are more likely than whites to die from their illnesses in part because they are more likely to lack health coverage.

The first time we came, in January of 2007, we didn't have the word Sustinet. We didn't have the road map that we have now. We didn't know that so many people, shop owners, labor leaders, health care providers, parents, and just regular folks, would join our cause. But we had the conviction that health care is a human right.

We had the idea that the level of coverage folks need for peace of mind is roughly what the Governor has. And we had the commitment to come back as many times as it took, for as long as it took, to make this change. And we have come back, again and again. We have studied policy, we have marched, we have prayed, we have met with those who support us and those who openly oppose us, we have sung, we have witnessed. Through it all our conviction has only grown stronger, our path only clearer and our aim only more just.

The problem, though, has only gotten worse. The number and percentage of uninsured has grown. The price of premiums has risen astronomically. The deductibles and co-pays are out of control. And the bodies of those who die for lack of health care, that we step over every day that we do nothing, are piling up.

We want to recognize your groundbreaking work in 2009, passing the first SustiNet bill and then courageously overriding Governor Rell's veto. It was a proud moment for our State, a moment when we could imagine a future in Connecticut where every child would grow up with a lifetime of access to affordable care. A lot of people invested time for a year and a half to craft the plan before you today. The Interfaith Fellowship wholeheartedly supports this plan, which has been incorporated into H.B. 6305.

We support this plan because it makes health care more affordable, because it expands access to care to the poorest of the uninsured, and because it requires tracking of, and developing strategies for addressing racial and ethnic health disparities. Wisely, SustiNet expands access when federal dollars become available to help defray the cost.

Anyone who thinks we cannot afford this reform hasn't looked closely at the economics, and hasn't faced the reality that what we can't afford is what we have now. Anyone who thinks we cannot afford this has not held the hands or heard the stories of those who cannot get in the door. The time to solve this problem is now.

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The Interfaith Fellowship for Universal Health Care is a multiracial, multicultural group of religious leaders of diverse faith traditions from across Connecticut. The organization has been a partner in the healthcare4every1 campaign to pass SustiNet - landmark legislation that creates a state public option in Connecticut and addresses insurance access, cost and quality.