

Testimony of Earl Baskerville
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Connecticut General Assembly Public Health Committee
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Chairman Ritter, Chairwoman Gerratana:

I am a food service worker at the University of Hartford and a shop steward in UNITE HERE! Local 217.

Several years ago, our employer came to us and told us that because the cost of Blue Cross Blue Shield was going way up, we would have to either change plans, or pay more for our health care.

We can't afford to pay more money out of pocket. So we decided to shop around. Fortunately for us, our union UNITE HERE! and other employers had developed a plan that would save money and preserve our benefits. We brought that to the company and they accepted it.

It took a lot of work, but we wound up with a plan that saved the employer money and kept our benefits strong.

But part of the deal was that we made a commitment to do our own work to control costs and improve our own health. Since we switched plans, we've done a series of things to try to save money and help ourselves be more healthy.

We formed a statewide committee to educate ourselves. We've met with everyone in our shop to make sure that they select a primary care doctor and get their health screenings done. The results go to the care coordinators at our plan.

A lot of people used to just go to the emergency room when they got sick. We've made sure that everyone knows that if you can't see your primary care doctor, you still should only go to the emergency room if it's really an emergency. If it's just a cold or something not too serious, go to urgent care and get the care you need without costing too much.

We've done our part to keep us healthy and save the limited funds available for our coverage. But hospitals are getting more powerful every day. If they are allowed to raise prices without some control, we're going to be right back at square one, fighting with our employers to not cut our benefits. We only have so much money in our fund.

The least you can do is make prices transparent, so everyone knows how much they are charging. We need to get rid of the facility fees that hospitals charge when they take over doctors' offices. And it's time to create an authority that actually monitors costs and quality and can make changes if prices get too high.