

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement regarding House passage of the Affordable Health Care for America Act. The congressman voted in favor of the legislation.

"Today, our country took a long, overdue step toward ensuring that every American has access to quality, affordable health care. By passing this bill, the House is ensuring that no American will ever be denied health coverage because of a pre-existing condition nor will any American ever lose their insurance because they become sick. The bill also eliminates co-pays for preventative care, which will encourage people to see a doctor for regular check-ups so that diseases and illnesses can be caught before becoming major health issues. This will save lives and it will also save money by avoiding the need for the more costly treatment of conditions that would have otherwise gone undetected until they became more severe. The bill also imposes yearly caps on out-of-pocket expenses so that no Americans are forced into insurmountable debt because they fall ill. At the same time, the bill prohibits insurance companies from placing their own caps on how much they will pay for care.

"Within the congressional district I represent, approximately 63 percent of the population, 415,000 residents, receive health insurance through their employers. Under this bill, if those people like their insurance plan and their doctors they can keep them while receiving increased benefits. Those who do not receive insurance through an employer or lose their coverage will be able to purchase insurance at group rates through the newly created Health Insurance Exchange that will feature an array of private insurance options along with a new public option. This will provide those people with access to new health insurance choices that were previously unavailable. The Exchange and public option, which will also be open to small businesses, will spur greater competition that will reign in costs.

"In order to ensure that health insurance isn't too expensive for those who don't receive coverage through an employer, individuals and families with an income level of up to four times the poverty level -- an income of up to \$88,000 for a family of four -- will receive affordability credits under the bill to help cover the cost of coverage. There are 158,000 households in the district I represent that could qualify for these affordability credits. Additionally, 16,100 small businesses in the district I represent will be able to participate in the Exchange with nearly 94 percent of those small businesses qualifying for tax credits to help them cover as much as 50 percent of the cost of providing health insurance.

"The 109,000 Medicare recipients who I represent in Congress will also benefit from free

preventative and wellness care, enhanced treatment, and the phased-in closing of the gap in prescription drug coverage -- known as the donut hole -- that currently forces 7,200 local seniors residing in the district I represent to pay the full cost of their drugs. Medicare recipients will also benefit from the federal government finally gaining the ability to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for the best drug prices possible. This will drive down the price that Medicare recipients will have to pay for their prescription drugs.

"While I would have strongly preferred a universal health care bill that guaranteed quality health insurance for every American, such a bill was unfortunately not politically viable at this time. Nevertheless, the bill we passed today provides coverage to 53,000 residents in the district I represent who currently have no health insurance. Since 2000, small business health care expenses in this country have risen 129 percent. Without the passage of this bill, the average American family would see its health care costs increase \$1,800 each year over the next decade. We already know that 53 percent of Americans postpone care or medication because of cost. That number would rise even higher without reform. In a country as great as ours we simply cannot allow health care to be cost-prohibitive. Every American must have access to quality, affordable health care. This bill takes enormous steps forward in that regard by fixing our broken health care system and reining in an out of control private insurance industry."